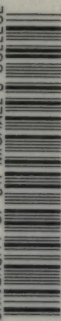


UNIVERSITY OF ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE



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My Lady's Garter



HONI SOIT QUI

MAL Y PENSE

By
Jacques Futrelle

Mary L.

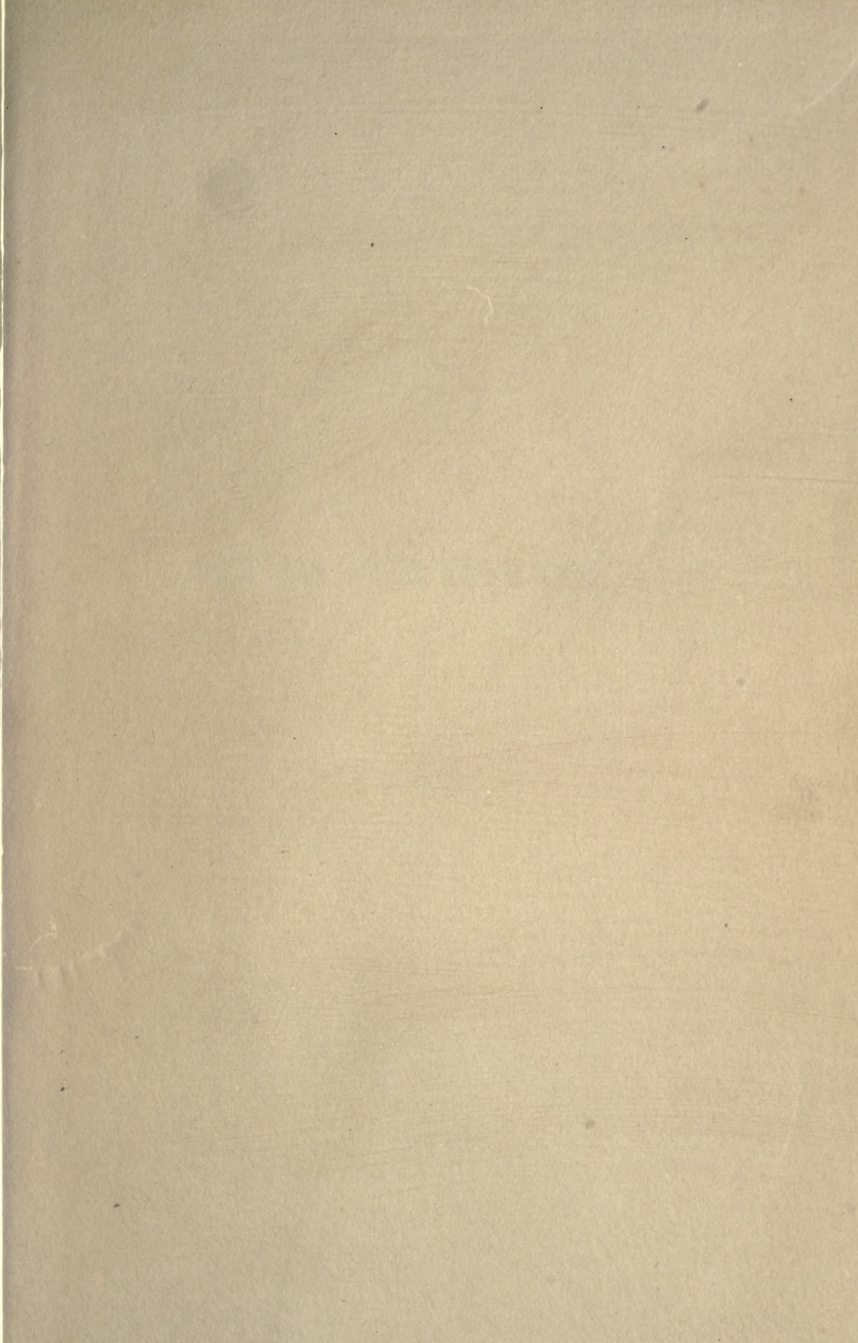


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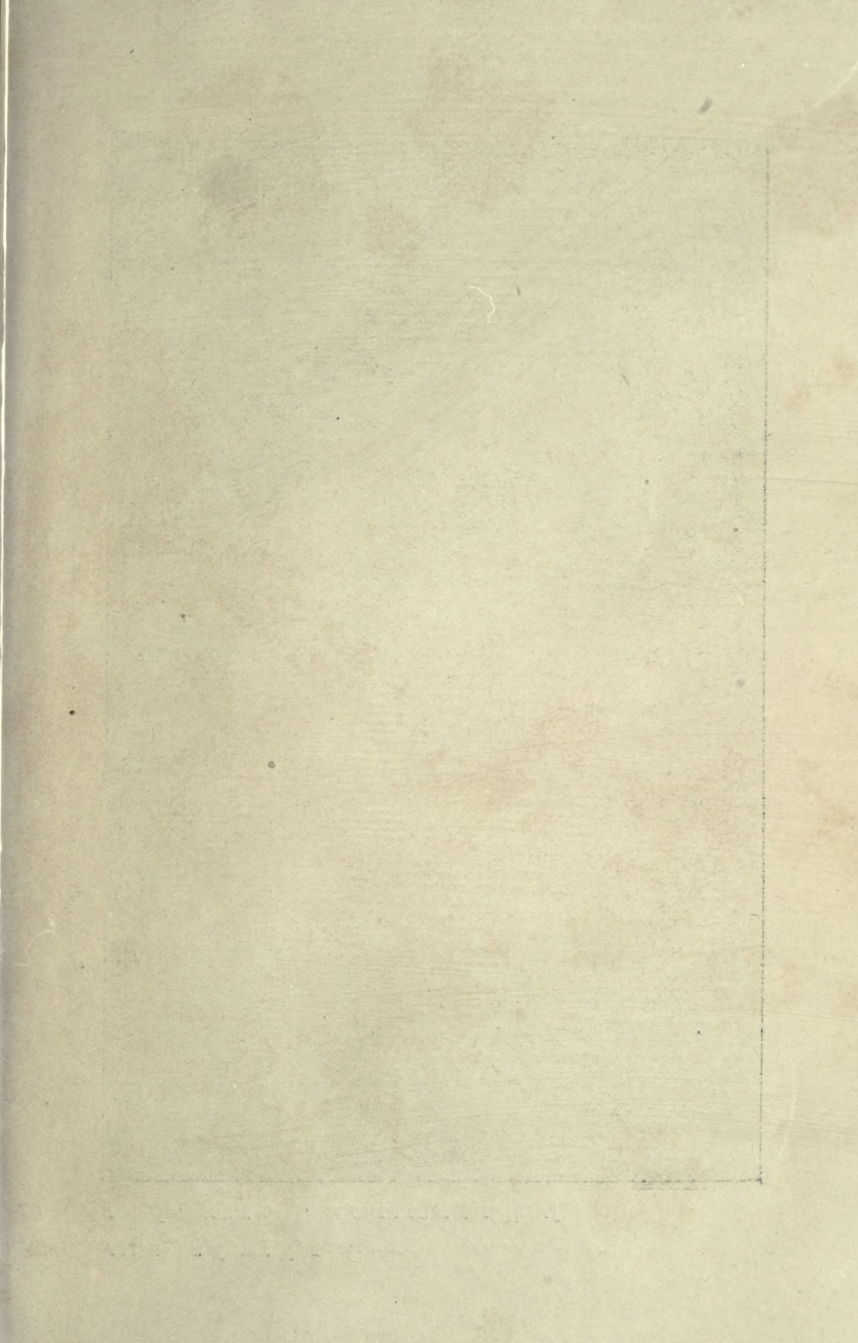
M. E. Dickson . 200
116 Ordnance St.

Canadian-born author of the
'Thinking Machine' stories; died
on the Titanic.





MY LADY'S GARTER





JACQUES FUTRELLE Frontispiece
My Lady's Garter

My Lady's Garter

THE LAST NOVEL

By JACQUES FUTRELLE



WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS

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New York

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To the Heroes of the Titanic

I DEDICATE THIS MY HUSBAND'S
BOOK

MAY FUTRELLE

MY LADY'S GARTER

PART I

MY LADY'S GARTER

ONCE upon a time, nearly six hundred years ago—about the year 1344 to be more explicit—His Gracious Majesty, King Edward III, guest of honor at the grand annual ball of the Larry L. Plantagenet Association, paused while dancing with the beautiful Countess of Salisbury, and, stooping, picked up from the floor—a lady's garter! It was a ribbon of dark blue, edged with yellow—a slender, shapely thing with buckle and pendant cunningly wrought of gold.

The countess gasped, blushed, grabbed hysterically at her left knee, then giggled! Even beautiful women giggle! A smile ran around the ballroom; the smile became a titter.

"Honi soit qui mal y pense!" His Majesty reproved sharply.

Now one may translate that a dozen ways: "Evil to him who evil thinks," or "Shame be upon him who thinks ill of it." Anyway,

those gay young blades who had been boning their French with the idea of assisting Edward III to the throne of France, discovered suddenly that there was nothing amusing in the incident; and ribald laughter died on their lips. For, be it understood, in those days it wasn't healthy to laugh unless the king laughed first.

Bending gravely, His Majesty placed the garter around his own leg, the left, just below the knee, and the dance went on to the end. Then:

"My—my garter, please?" stammered the countess in charming confusion.

"I shall return a pair of them, my dear Countess—a pair done in gold," His Majesty told her gallantly. "Perchance there may be a jewel or so in the royal strong box with which to adorn them. You will honor me by accepting them."

The Countess curtseyed to the floor.

So, romantically enough, was born Britain's highest order of chivalry, the Order of the Garter. Its insignia is a slender ribbon of dark blue, edged with yellow, and overlaid with shields of gold, upon each of which is the motto: "*Honi soit qui mal y pense!*" Its pendant represents St. George, armored,

on a white horse, poking a large spear down the vermilion throat of a green dragon with a barbed tail. Ten thousand men have died for it.

Just what Queen Philippa, Edward's consort, had to say about it when her husband appeared before her wearing another woman's garter, or how the Countess of Salisbury managed for the remainder of the evening, doesn't appear. These, together with other interesting details, are lost in the mists of antiquity.

For many years a lady's garter lay among the precious relics tucked away in an obscure corner of the British Museum. It differed from the widely known insignia of the Order of the Garter only in its apparent extreme age,—and in the fact that diamonds and rubies were set alternately in the six shields of gold overlaying the ribbon. This was one of the two original garters given to the Countess of Salisbury by His Majesty, Edward III.

Something like a year since the garter vanished. Obviously, it had been stolen.

PART II

THE ADVENTURES OF THE HAWK

CHAPTER I

LOVE is the one immutable quality we poor humans possess. It is unchanging as the whiteness of snow, or the redness of roses, or the blush of the desert dawn. Its object may alter—alas, how often it does!—but love itself is an essential. That was as true ten thousand æons ago as it is now, and as it will be ten thousand æons hence. So, perforce, the delver into emotions must be trite in his expositions. 'Twas only a whim of the somber goddess who spins the threads of our lives that saved from triteness the affair I am about to recount. One wonders at times if there may not be a grinning countenance behind Fate's tragic mask! Who can say?

In this instance it appears that the goddess acted deliberately. She had an afternoon off from her spinning, and amused herself by entangling two threads of destiny—a white one and a black one. The white one was that of S. Keats Gaunt, poet, æsthete, and heir to millions; and the black one was that

of The Hawk, gentleman adventurer, master crook, and all-around expert in the legerdemain of theft. The result of her caprice must have amazed even the goddess in all her infinite solemnity.

In the beginning genius unbound—I am referring specifically to that rising young maker of verses, S. Keats Gaunt, familiarly Skeets—had pierced the empyrean and in that starry vault found the Ideal; and had shot flaming, love-tipped javelins of poesy with so sure an aim that, wounded and fainting, that Ideal had fallen into his arms and nestled there, smiling. The holy fire of passion burst into iambics, and odes, and epics and things; following which we have the spectacle of a dreamy-eyed, long-haired young man going to his millionaire coal-baron father, and stating the case.

The interview took place in his father's office, and at its peroration, consisting of two pæans shamelessly snatched from Shakespeare, John Gaunt swung around in his swivel chair and stared at his son scowlingly. There were a lot of things about this son of his that he didn't like; sometimes he caught himself wondering if anybody *did* like 'em! Some fathers are like that.

"And who, may I ask," he queried with exaggerated courtesy, "who is the lady you have chosen to honor with so marked an—er—er—" He was never good at pretty speeches.

"Helen Hamilton," replied the poet.

"Helen Hamilton?" John Gaunt rose from his seat with a roar, and his big fists were clenched. "Helen Blazes!" And he sat down again.

"Hamilton," Skeets corrected mildly.

"What in—! You can't—! Was ever a man—! Why, in the name—!" John Gaunt spluttered on into sheer incoherency. There were simply no words to fit it, that was all. Finally, with an effort: "You can't mean that snippy, redheaded, little turned-up nose daughter of—of Brokaw Hamilton?"

"I mean the most beautiful woman God ever made," and the poet's soul was swimming in his eyes, "Helen Hamilton, daughter of Brokaw Hamilton."

John Gaunt's face blazed like a rising sun; the veins in his thick neck swelled.

"No!"—the voice of an angered lion.

"Why not?" Skeets wanted to know.

"Her family is as good as our own—better;

her father has as many millions as you have, perhaps more; her social position—”

“No!” John Gaunt barked again thunderously. “No! No!! No!!!”

The young man arose and stood, unemotionally pulling on a pair of pale lavender gloves. He was not surprised at the objection; he had rather expected it, because of an old feud between his father and Brokaw Hamilton.

“I’m sorry you feel that way about it,” he remarked.

“Now, look here, Sammy, if you—”

“Not Sammy, please, father.”

“Samuel, then,” and the belligerent voice suddenly softened to a pleading whine. “Now look here, Samuel, I’ve always been a kind and indulgent father to you, haven’t I?”

“I suppose so.”

“I’ve let you wear your hair long like that, and haven’t said a word, have I?”

“No.”

“And I didn’t object at all when you began parting your name in the middle, did I?”

“No.”

“I’ve even called you Keats when I remembered, haven’t I?”

Skeets conceded the point.

"And when nobody would accept your poetry, didn't I buy you a magazine to print it in?"

"Yes." A deep sigh, and the poet dreamily brushed the long forelock from his eyes. "After all, posterity—"

"And haven't you been printing all you could write?" John Gaunt went on hastily—he knew that speech about posterity. "Now, do be reasonable. Run along and play with your magazine. Cut out the gab about this snippy, redheaded little—"

"Pardon me!" and for an instant the poet's eyes forgot to be poetic. They glittered.

"This—this absurd idea about Miss Hamilton," his father amended.

"What's your objection to her?"

"I don't like her father."

"It's not her father I want to marry."

"I don't care *who* it is you want to marry," John Gaunt raged suddenly. "If he, she, or it is named Hamilton, I object. Do you understand? That's all."

"That is your irrevocable answer?"

"Yes."

Skeets strolled out of the office.

The following day the price of coal went up. John Gaunt had to take it out on somebody, so he put the skids under the consumer, and fell to wondering hazily if he could find a feasible scheme by which he might strip Brokaw Hamilton of his millions.

Skeets spent forty-eight hours composing more iambics, and odes, and epics and things, all of them dripping gloom. Black wasn't half black enough as a simile for the melancholy which possessed him.

On the day of that fateful interview Helen Hamilton, too, had done the conventional thing—that is, she did it as nearly as she ever did anything conventionally. Anyway, she went to her father. He happened to be a railroad magnate, like and yet unlike the masterful John Gaunt. Their points of resemblance were a genius for accumulating millions and a hatred, each for the other, which had endured stanchly, unfalteringly, for a dozen years.

Oddly enough, Brokaw Hamilton was, at the moment, engaged in working out a plan by which he hoped to apply the screws to the Gaunt coal interests through his own multiple railway connections.

He was at a big desk in his study—a curious

room, littered with articles of vertu, and rare and elegant bric-a-brac. It was an obsession with him, this collecting of quaint artistic trifles, anything that happened to appeal to his catholic taste—personal ornaments, pictures, plate, jewels. One of the paperweights on his desk was the mummied foot of an Egyptian princess, and beside it lay a heavy, square-shouldered coin of the time of Nero. In a small glass case beside his pen rack was an antiquated, mangy goose quill with which, Brokaw Hamilton liked to believe, King John had unwillingly signed Magna Charta. Three or four cabinets against the wall were filled with treasures garnered from the four corners of the world. One end of his house was given over to the pictures and larger articles of his collection; here in his study he kept the smaller and more precious.

The hobby had cost him millions, and he liked to recall that he had gouged many of those millions out of John Gaunt. Their warfare of a dozen years had been bitter, merciless, continuous, with no quarter asked and none given. Now for the *coup de grace*! If this new plan he was working on turned out as he wished, gad, he'd make John Gaunt squirm! And he would celebrate the event

by buying that Corot he had his eye on! A quarter of a million francs! Dirt cheap!

Helen came romping into the study; she was the kind of girl who romped. Her vigorous young muscles were wiry and indefatigable; she could follow a golf ball for miles and clout it in the eye every clip; or play tennis, or ride horseback, or swim, or drive a motor car—or repair it, for that matter. Altogether, an able young citizen was Helen, with a self-reliance that was inborn. She would have been astonished if any one had ever suggested to her that she might need help to do a thing.

“Hello, Pops,” she greeted irreverently. “Are you busy?”

“Yes, very.” He didn’t look up.

“I just came in to tell you I’m in love.”

“Yes, yes,” abstractedly. “Speak to your mother about it.”

Helen perched herself on an end of the big desk as one privileged, and sat there swinging one foot, nursing her knee. Her nose crinkled charmingly; a small nose, saucy, tip-tilted, piquant.

“I say, I’m in love,” she repeated aggressively. “You don’t seem a bit excited about it. Do pay attention to me!” She leaned

over and crumpled up the sheets of scrawly figures upon which her father was at work. "Do you hear? I'm in love!"

Brokaw Hamilton was used to this petty tyranny. He reached for the crumpled sheets, knowing the effort to be vain, then with a sigh dropped back into his chair.

"In love!" he repeated. "You? Pooh, pooh! Why, you're nothing but a child!"

"I'm twenty-one," she protested. "A child, indeed! Why, I'm almost an old maid!"

Her father's thoughts were far away. . . . There were hundreds of thousands of tons of Gaunt coal to be hauled every year. . . . If he could get away with this, and keep out of the clutches of the Interstate Commerce Commission, why—

"Well?" Helen demanded imperiously. "Why don't you ask me who it is?"

"Who is it?"—obediently.

"He's a poet!" triumphantly. "I mean a real poet—a regular poet who gets 'em printed." She unfolded a sheet torn out of a magazine and smoothed it on her knee. "Now just listen, please; and remember I am the Helen of whom he speaks:

" 'O Helen, thy hair is an aura of gold—
O Helen! ' "

"Sounds like swearing," complained her father; "that 'O Helen,' I mean."

"Why, Pops! I think it is perfectly heavenly. And there's a whole page of it. It goes on like this:

" 'O Helen, thy hair is an aura of gold—

O Helen!

O Helen, thine eyes hold a secret untold—

O Helen!

O Helen, thy lips—' "

"Best thing I ever heard," interrupted the railroad magnate hurriedly. "So original, too! Leave it, and I'll look it over some time. I'm very busy now."

" 'Aura of gold!' Isn't that perfectly corking, Pops? 'Aura of gold!'" She detached a strand of her hair and inspected it critically by the simple process of looking at it cross-eyed. "But *I* should have called it red. Why, Pops, it *is* red—red as a geranium."

"Yes, yes," he assented absently. His eyes were contracted, his thoughts far away again.

"Wouldn't it be scrumptious, Pops, to have a poet in the family? He could compose odes to our birthdays, and anniversaries, and—and when the cook leaves. And I'm simply crazy about him, Pops! It's been going

on for months—the poems in the magazines, I mean, all of them dedicated to me. Please, may I have him?”

Helen caught her father's face in her strong young hands, and compelled him to look at her.

“What does your mother say about it?” he asked, smiling.

“Well, she doesn't seem very enthusiastic,” Helen confessed. “You know, Pops,” she ran on in a gush of confidence, “lots of men have made love to me, and there wasn't one of them I'd have. Why, I *couldn't* marry a man whom I could beat playing golf, and tennis, and all those things. But a poet! You see, he's different. One doesn't expect him to—to do all that. His soul is above those things! He would be writing things about me always—oh, lovely poems!” She leaned forward and dabbed her rosy lips against the corrugated brow of her father. “And he'd get 'em printed, too!”

“Who,” her father inquired finally, with a flicker of interest, “who is this wonderful poet who ‘gets 'em printed’?”

Helen pursed her lips and swung a silk-stockinged ankle violently.

“That's just it,” she said. “Mother said

when I told you you would go off like a set piece at a Fourth of July celebration."

"I can imagine your mother saying that," commented her father sarcastically, "just as you have expressed it."

"Well, anyway, she said you'd be awfully angry."

"Why should I be angry?" he went on curiously. "Who is your poet who 'gets 'em printed'?"

"You won't get mad and bellow?"

"Who is he?"

"Skeets Gaunt."

Brokaw Hamilton sat motionless, regarding her for a tense instant, then came to his feet with angrily writhing hands, following which there was a series of vocal explosions which failed to resolve themselves into words. Helen watched him with a pout on her lips, and disappointment in her blue, blue eyes.

"There!" she said at last. "Mother said you'd do that!"

"No!" bawled Brokaw Hamilton. "No! A thousand times, no! That pale-faced, long-haired, squidgy-shouldered shrimp—the son of John Gaunt? No!"

Helen slid from the desk and enfolded her infuriated parent in her arms; round, brown

arms that were about as soft and yielding as a—as a steel cable. She held him until he ceased to struggle, her eyes meeting his pleadingly, her voice tenderly alluring:

“Please, Pops!”

“No!”

“Pretty please!”

“No!!”

“Pretty please with kisses on it?”

“No!!!”

Helen shook her respected father angrily, as a terrier shakes a rat—shook him until the parental teeth rattled—after which she released him and strode to the door with smouldering eyes. There she stopped and stamped a small foot majestically.

“I will have him!” she declared hotly. “I will! I will! I will! And I think you’re a mean old thing, so there!”

Having relieved herself of this rebellious sentiment she went out, banging the door behind her. She spent the next hour scolding her maid. The maid smiled patiently; she was used to it.

That which we are forbidden to have is that we most desire. Had Brokaw Hamilton and John Gaunt been as wise in the workings of the human heart as they were in the

railroad and coal business respectively, they would have known parental objection is an infallible method of bringing doubting hearts together. For the inevitable happened.

Forty-eight hours' toil with a rhyming dictionary and thesaurus sufficed to empty Skeets Gaunt's soul upon white paper. It was a vast bitterness, and he spread it over reams and reams; after which, practically enough, he sent a telegram to Helen. It was to this effect:

"My father objects.

"SKEETS."

The answer came immediately:

"So does mine.

"HELEN."

An hour elapsed; another telegram:

"Let's elope.

"SKEETS."

The answer:

"You're on.

"HELEN."

Ten minutes later:

"Meet me at St. Regis for luncheon to-morrow.

We will arrange details.

"SKEETS."

The messenger went back with this:

"I'll be there.

"HELEN."

As I said, all this was inevitable, having already happened some thousands of times—inevitable and trite, merely leading up to those incidents which followed the first entangling of the life threads of S. Keats Gaunt, poet, and The Hawk, gentleman adventurer.

CHAPTER II

HAVING lined his capacious inner man with a couple of pies which he had adroitly filched from a kitchen window under the very eyes of the cook, The Hawk drew his threadbare coat more closely about him and moved along the road sluggishly, like a gorged snake, seeking a spot whereon to lay his weary head. It was shortly after ten o'clock at night, and the bullying wind which came whooping in from Long Island Sound, and bellowed through the bright new green leaves of the overhanging trees, had just enough chill in it to make a night in the open unattractive. Through interlacing boughs The Hawk could see, too, heavy, damp clouds scudding across the heavens, growing momentarily blacker. After awhile it would rain; now he must find some indoor place to sleep.

Realization of this immediate necessity brought him to a reflective standstill, and he looked back upon the scantily lighted road he had just come, trying to remember if he had passed a barn or a vacant house. Finally, shaking his head, he turned and looked

the other way, on toward the city of New York, some dozen or more miles off. A couple of hundred yards ahead of him an electric light glimmered at a bend in the road. Beyond might be the very place he was seeking, so he trudged on, head down to the wind.

Evil days were these for The Hawk, lean, empty, profitless days. Occasionally, through the haze of half a dozen years, he permitted himself the luxury of recollection—recollection of the splendid prodigality of his early criminal career—an endless summer of roses and wine. Endless? Well, hardly that, after all. For there had come an end, abruptly, one morning when he awoke to find the police of the world—specifically Detective Meredith of the city of New York—halloing about his ears. That day, six years ago, he had forsaken the glory that had been his and vanished into oblivion with the hounds of justice yelping at his heels.

The gnarled finger of Time had written many chapters in his little book since then—chapters of hardship, all of them, but not without avail, for that same finger had made some erasures as well; and finally the hounds had been thrown off the scent and had

returned to their kennels, beaten. So now, after men's memories had lapsed, The Hawk was daring to go back to those scenes of his early triumphs—the great, glittering, relentless city of New York—to lay heavy toll upon it for all these bootless years. Daddy Heinz was still alive; he would begin there with good clothes, clean linen, and a square meal.

In the days of his glory The Hawk had been foremost in his profession. He had stolen smilingly, audaciously, and incessantly, but always with the fine discriminating eye of an artist, disdaining the booty which fell to the lot of the commonplace thief. In those days he had specialized in jewels—other people's; now he was driven to filching pies from kitchen windows. It pained his æsthetic soul. In the old days his home had been a suite in a fashionable hotel; now he was seeking a vacant house and a soft spot in the floor thereof. In the old days, as George Harrington Leigh, he had won and held a position in the social life of the metropolis; he had been a member of a dozen or more clubs, and a welcome guest in many of the city's exclusive homes; now the only place where he could be sure of a welcome was in a cell.

No one realized more acutely than he the disgrace of his plunge from the exalted pinnacle George Harrington Leigh had once adorned. That bold daring which had mystified and tantalized the police of the world, and had ultimately made him the most widely sought criminal of his day, and that superficial polish which had given him the outward appearance of a gentleman, had sloughed off with the name; by environment The Hawk, nameless now, had become a sneaking, cringing creature of darkness, startled by an unexpected voice, terrified by a sudden footstep. So he had lived for half a dozen years, lived until he rebelled at the monotonous squalor of it all. He was essentially luxurious by nature; he would chance it all, and go back to the luxury he craved—wrench it from the grasping greed of New York. What had been done once could be done again!

Physically The Hawk was more perfectly equipped now than he had ever been for the parasitic career he intended to renew. The rotundity which had come from fat living in the George Harrington Leigh days had gone; now he was slender, almost boyish in figure, inconspicuous of stature, lithe, powerful,

sinewy—built like a steel bridge. The face beneath the scrubby brown beard was still youthful, the hair thick and waving; the lips boasted the same old innocent smile, and the eyes were as guileless as ever—shallow as water in a pan. Fear of recognition, even by Detective Meredith, his nearest, dearest, most intimate enemy, had little place in his calculations. Six years had passed. In appearance he was no longer the man Detective Meredith had known—the ultra-fashionable George Harrington Leigh.

There in the highway The Hawk paused to thank his stars that there had never been a photograph of him in existence, not even a vagrant snapshot. Once before he had thanked his stars for this—at the time of his disappearance, when a world-wide alarm had been sent out for him, and there had been no picture, only a description. And a convenient description it was—one that might be fitted to three men in every ten.

Introspection was brought to an end abruptly by the spluttering of an automobile engine, and The Hawk moved to one side, out of the road. The car seemed to be just around the bend, screened by a green blanket of shrubbery; and as he went on he saw its

red tail light skimming off toward the glowing, cloud-reflected radiance of the city in the distance. Idly enough he noted the number of the automobile—1234. Then his attention was attracted by something else that happened to be of far more importance at the instant—a 'To Let' sign nailed to a gatepost. Obviously, here was a vacant house—a place to sleep.

Glooming up before him, somewhat back from the road, he made out dimly the lines of an old mansion set in the midst of wind-worried trees. With one quick, furtive look about, The Hawk vaulted the low fence and skulked along through the shadows toward the house. His cat-like eyes told him that the front door had been nailed up, and that all the blinds were closed. Good! He'd get in the back way. Somewhere he'd find an unfastened window or an insecure lock, and, if not, there were other ways.

He laid a hand upon the crossbarred timbers of the back door and tried them tentatively. They were loose. He pulled, and they fell off. He tried the knob. It turned, and the door opened silently inward. He peered down the long, black hall for half a minute, listening; there was only the creaking

and groaning of the trees overhead. He stepped inside, and recognized instantly the musty odor of an unoccupied house. He closed the door behind him.

Of the very nature of things, The Hawk was noiseless in his movements, noiselessness being a prime requisite in the gentle art of thieving; so from the moment he pushed open the door until he had passed almost the length of the hall there had not been a sound—not so much as the whisper of a footfall. His left hand, following the wall, came to an open door. He turned into a room and, confident, took three or four steps forward, peering about him in the blackness. Chilly enough in here, but better than outside on a night like this. Anything to—

Suddenly he stopped still, crouching. There, hanging in the pall of gloom on a level with his eyes, directly in front of him and not more than a dozen feet away, was a single luminous point—the glowing end of a cigarette with a tendril of smoke curling upward! The Hawk's muscles flexed and, with his gaze riveted upon the point of light, he slid a cautious foot backward with the one idea of escaping. Surely his entrance had been silent, when the man smoking that cigarette

hadn't heard him! Another cautious foot followed the first—the door was here, somewhere, right behind him; then came a quick, violent crash, and The Hawk felt himself going over. His head struck the wall with a whack, whereupon he was regaled with an astonishing astronomical exhibition.

Further necessity of caution was gone. He scrambled to his feet, extricated himself from the chair he had stumbled into, and ran blindly, headlong, into the wall. The fall had knocked all sense of direction out of him. He tried for the door a second time, and again he struck the wall. Without further ado he dropped flat on his face on the floor.

"Don't shoot!" he called.

Now would come a rush of feet, and lights, and excitement, under cover of which he hoped to escape. He waited with indrawn breath. Nothing happened. Instead, came dead silence again—a silence that seemed to be pressing down upon him as a weight. Astonished, he raised his head and screwed his neck around in anticipation of the worst, whatever it might be. There, in front of him, was still the lighted cigarette, motionless as before. The quiet was so tense he could hear his heart beat.

Slowly fear gave way to curiosity. Why didn't somebody start something? A dead man could have heard all that clatter!

"Well, how about it?" he queried of the void.

There was no answer. An inexplicable chill ran down The Hawk's spinal column, and to put an end to the eeriness of it he fished out a match and struck it, holding it far to one side. If anybody did shoot he would shoot in the direction of the flame. The feeble flicker showed him a huge marble mantel and, resting upon it, a lighted cigarette, nearly burned out. One hasty glance about the room assured him he was alone. This settled, he glanced again toward the cigarette. Lying beside it on the mantel was a small package, wrapped in white paper. He stared at it inquiringly until the match scorched his fingers and went out.

During that next half minute, still prone upon the floor with ears trapped for the slightest sound and eyes straining, he watched the cigarette burn down to a stub and the light of it vanish, the while he did some thinking. A cigarette wouldn't burn more than eight or ten minutes at most, therefore the person **who** had placed it on the mantel

had only just gone out as he had entered—gone out of the house certainly, otherwise the clatter of his fall would have brought him back into the room. All of which led his thoughts back to the automobile—1234. Evidently it had been standing in front and the person, or persons, who had gone away in it had left this cigarette and the package.

The Hawk arose, struck another match, and picked up the cigarette stub. There might be a lingering whiff in it, and in these days of his degradation he was not above smoking another man's leavings. No, it was too far gone. A good cigarette, too—a Regent he saw by the gold print on the tip. He held up the paper parcel and shook it inquiringly, after which he opened it, disclosing a—well, what the deuce was it? A bracelet? No. A—a necklace? No-o! It was a slender ribbon of dark blue, edged with yellow and overlaid with shields of gold in which there were set alternately diamonds and rubies. There was a pendant, too—St. George and the Dragon; and a motto in ancient lettering, barely decipherable: "*Honi soit qui mal y pense!*"

It had been many, many moons since The Hawk had held a jewel in his hand, and his

first emotion was one of sheer delight at the iridescent beauty of these—the delight of a connoisseur which embraced not only the stones but the delicate, exquisite workmanship of the gold in which they were set. The thing, whatever it might be, was old, old!

Until the match burned out the spell held him dumb and motionless. The light of another match revealed a subtle change in his face. It was no longer that of the connoisseur; it was that of the expert. The guileless eyes had narrowed; they were fairly aglitter with avarice as The Hawk studied the stones—three diamonds and three rubies. At least five carats, every one of them, and flawless, as well as he could make out in the uncertain light. A fortune picked off a mantel in a vacant house!

“Honk! Honk!”

The cry of an automobile horn just outside cut cleanly through the enshrouding gloom and hauled The Hawk around to a realization of the necessity of escape. The person or persons who had left this—this, whatever it was—had come back for it! He snapped out the match, darted through the open doorway, and sped along the hall. He flung the back

door open wide, and a flying leap took him through.

Just rounding the corner of the building, coming toward him, were the shadowy figures of three men. A dozen steps, and The Hawk had vanished into the park-like woods in the rear.

"Halt!" came a sharp command.

The Hawk, intent upon business of his own, did not answer. A moment later there came the crash of a revolver, and he heard a bullet thud into a tree butt at his right.

"Stand guard at that door, Fallon," some one commanded brusquely. "We'll get this chap!"

"This," and The Hawk laughed blithely as he ran, "this is no place for a minister's son!"

CHAPTER III

IF the Countess of Salisbury's ghost—and a charming spook it must be, to be sure!—I say, if the Countess of Salisbury's ghost ever lays aside harp or pitchfork, whichever she uses in the Great Hereafter—a harp, of course! How rude of me!—ever lays harp aside and deigns to stalk this mundane sphere; and if she—or it—happened to be hanging around that vacant house that night, keeping a watchful eye over that gorgeous trifle, the gift of a king which once upon a time adorned one of her shapely—er—er—knees, then she—or it—must have been astonished at the things that happened—astonished and, perchance, indignant at the laying of profane hands upon a trinket so personally intimate.

But inscrutable is the infinite. Perhaps her spook wasn't astonished at all. Perhaps she—or it—understood perfectly in what circumstances her garter came to be on the mantel in that vacant house; perhaps she—or it—knew that a thief would find it there; perhaps she—or it—even knew that that thief would be The Hawk; perhaps she—or it—knew that two determined men with the

instincts of bloodhounds would chase The Hawk more than a mile across country, up and down alleys, in and out of woods, over fences, through hedges; and that ever and anon as he fled his speed would be stimulated by the petulant pop of a pistol in his rear. Perhaps, as I say, the spook knew right along that all this was going to happen.

Anyway, there is an end of all things. Chance led the flying footsteps of The Hawk into a narrow street of a village in The Bronx. On each side of him was a deep hedge of shrubbery, but The Hawk didn't make the mistake this time of going over or through either of these. Instead, he ran on to the end of the street with his pursuers in sight a hundred yards back, turned to his right, leaped the hedge immediately after he had rounded the corner, and doubled back through the yard in the rear of some big estate. Ten seconds later he heard the heavy thud-thud of two men's footsteps beyond the hedge as they rushed past him in the opposite direction. They were not more than three yards away; he could hear them blowing.

Listening tensely until they had turned the corner, The Hawk, crouching close to the ground, leaped, clearing the hedge, into the

narrow street the two men had just left. He darted directly across it and plunged rabbit-like through the hedge on the other side. This, too, was some big estate. He ran noiselessly, yet earnestly, across the wide velvety lawn, around the mansion which loomed magnificently in front of him, and settled down on a tree stump to get his breath. The jeweled garter was still clasped tightly in his left hand, and he was grinning cheerfully, with his tongue hanging out. His pursuers were bound full tilt in the other direction.

Ten minutes passed. All sound of pursuit had died away in the distance. The dead night swooped down upon him suddenly, a tangible darkness; a pulsing of waters as they rippled musically came to him, and a cricket cried under his heel. Quite himself again after his breathing space, The Hawk fell to building castles in the air, the while he caressed lovingly the little trinket that was to change the whole tenor of his life. How and where it came from he didn't know; he wasn't sufficiently interested to even wonder about it. He was engrossed in contemplation of the fact that its coming meant that the lean days were past, and hidden under a

new name and a new identity he would again assume the life of luxury which Detective Meredith had so rudely interrupted six years previously.

Already he had driven the starting wedge into this new life, thanks to the regal generosity of Edward III some six hundred years ago, for now in his outstretched palm he held jewels, coruscating in the darkness, worth—worth, well, at the very lowest, ten thousand dollars, possibly twenty, even thirty. All in all it was a very tidy beginning. It would serve to reintroduce him to the world where his star had once been resplendent, and with the renewal of those ties of the past, under his new name of course, would come full opportunity for the display of those talents with which nature had endowed him. There remained only to see Daddy Heinz in order to convert prospects into coin of the realm.

The Hawk rose impulsively and shook a fist at the glowing spectrum of New York.

"What I have done to you," he informed the unsuspecting metropolis, "isn't a marker to what I'm going to do to you now!"

In his venturesome life The Hawk had had many surprises, one of them within the last hour. Now came another, a sibilant warning

from some mysterious recess of the night—a warning in a woman's voice!

“Sh-h-h-h!” It was a long aspiration. “Not so loud, silly!” This in a reproving whisper. “Don't make a sound!”

Mechanically The Hawk's muscles grew taut and a thrill tingled through his nerve fibers. Only his head moved as his furtive eyes searched the gloom for the source of the voice. He *didn't* make a sound; that was one of the best things he did—not making a sound. He merely stared, stared, seeking to penetrate the veil of night, the while his heels fairly itched to be going.

“Come here under my window and catch these things,” came a cautious command. Glancing up at the suggestion, The Hawk made out dimly a vague splotch of a face set in the blackness of a window frame on the second floor. “And do hurry!”

The tone was imperious. The Hawk obeyed from an impulse he himself couldn't have analyzed. It may have been sheer dare-deviltry; it may have been the lure of the voice—one can always tell the voice of a pretty woman. Anyway, The Hawk darted across the intervening space and crouched close in the shadow of the wall beneath the window.

"Now catch this, and be very, very careful!" He knew the woman in the window was leaning out, holding over his head a—what was it? A trunk? "If you crush this, or drop it, I'll never forgive you. It's my best hat!"

The Hawk drew a long breath. The massive box suspended over him fell, like a feather. He caught it adroitly and placed it on the ground beside him. And he wasn't at all surprised. It seemed the most natural thing in the world that he should be hauled up in the lee of a strange house at eleven o'clock at night catching hats out of a window at the command of a voice whose owner he didn't know, the while two determined men were ripping the earth open looking for him.

"Now, my bag, please," came the voice again. He could read in it the sweet confidence born of his not having dropped the hat. "It's rather heavy. Be careful!"

Obediently The Hawk grabbed out into the night and rescued a suit case. Heavy! It nearly took him off his feet. Obviously it was filled with bricks or—or lead pipe, or something! He set the bag on the ground and looked up again, expectantly.

Came a pause. From the window above

he heard a rustle of skirts, cautious footsteps, then an impatient: "Oh, fudge! Where did I put it?" He volunteered no information, and a moment later a blinding flash of light shot out the window and went streaming off into the darkness. Instinctively The Hawk drew closer to the wall, and for one instant there was a gripping fear at his heart.

In the next second he was reassured. A head was thrust out of the window, a girl's head, curiously diaphanous, effulgent even. The oddness of the effect was due to the brilliancy of electric lights shining through brick-red hair from behind, making a fluffy, puffy cloud of head and shoulders. He got only a glimpse of her face as she turned. Of course she was pretty. He had known that from her voice, but here was a vision that anchored him in his tracks! In one hand she held a small box.

"Now catch this," she ordered. She was staring straight down at him, but the blaze of light enveloping her made the gloom where he stood more dense. "Put this in your pocket and take good care of it. It's my jewel case."

She dropped the box and The Hawk grabbed greedily. Jewels! The magic of

the word broke the witching spell. He shook the box inquiringly. Jewels and more jewels!

"Now listen just a minute," the girl directed, and the light died as she spoke. "The automobile is waiting two blocks away. Now, while I'm putting on my coat and veil you must sneak down to the stable around the corner there and get a ladder. I simply can't jump this distance. I'll be ready by the time you get back."

Gallantry is inborn in most of us, like the appendix. For a scant instant The Hawk felt its spur and was tempted—shall I say by the melody of the girl's voice and the haunting glimpse of her face?—was tempted to carry out the adventure to the end if for no other reason than to get a nearer view of Her Loveliness. But cold reason dissipated this whim born of a woman's charm. Why take idle chances with a kindly Fate? He had the jewels; he would hike for the highway—the restless city of New York beckoned him on.

"Hurry, now!" commanded the girl.

Useless words! The Hawk ran, vanishing an instant later around a corner of the house; ran and ran on, gripping the jewel case in

one hand and the Countess of Salisbury's garter in the other. An hour later he was five miles nearer New York. Tired? Why, he never felt so fresh and unfatigued in his life! He had stolen a quick look at the contents of the jewel case, and nearly fainted at the multicolored glow therein.

"Haroun al Raschid! Pooh! Pooh!" The Hawk remarked to the world at large. "The things that have been happening to me would make his adventures sound as prosaic as a laundry ticket." The skies opened, and fat, spattery raindrops pounded on his head. "There's nothing to it—I have come back!" A long silence. "Why, she's a queen!"

A pretty girl at a darkened window, gazing out into the night with anxious eyes.

"What could have happened to Skeets?" she wondered. "Why doesn't he hurry with that ladder? My best hat is simply being ruined!"

CHAPTER IV

WHILE all these incredible things were happening to The Hawk, Skeets Gaunt, his poetic soul in an ecstasy of happiness, was hastening along to that sweet rendezvous which had for its ultimate object the making of Helen Hamilton into Mrs. Skeets. Catching a glimpse of two men in the dark distance, and hearing the rush of their footsteps coming toward him through the empty street, he withdrew timidly into the shadow of a hedge. Ten seconds later he was yanked out rudely by four powerful hands, and a large revolver was poked under his nose.

"You *will* make us chase you all over The Bronx, will you?" panted one of his captors. "Might have known we'd get you."

Long-haired, dreamy-eyed poets, particularly if they happen to be sons of men like John Gaunt, are not necessarily to be put upon. Skeets felt that he was being put upon. His first natural impression was that he had to do with highwaymen, and without hesitation he belted the man who held the revolver plumb in the nose. The weapon

went flying. He was about to perform a similar office for the other man when the steel nippers closed around his wrist and were twisted cruelly.

"You'll resist an officer, too, will you?" and the grip on his wrist tightened. "Cut it out, or I'll tear your hand off!"

"What in blazes do you mean by grabbing me like that?" demanded the poet unpoetically. "Why didn't you say you were officers? What do you want?"

"You," tersely.

"What for?"

"I don't suppose you could even guess, huh?"

Skeets wriggled a little to arouse himself. He was sound asleep, of course. This thing wasn't happening at all. In a minute his valet would come and tap on his door to say his bath was ready.

"Search him!"

Dream or no dream, Skeets raised his voice in expostulation when the thick fingers of Detective Bailey produced his pocketbook, and rifled the bills therein—some two thousand dollars. Detective Cunningham's eyes opened wide at sight of the money; and reflected a vast understanding when Bailey fished out two tickets for Europe.

"The getaway was all fixed," Bailey elucidated, "and we know there are two of 'em."

"What the—" Skeets began.

"Shut up!"

Bailey placed the pocketbook inside his coat, and resumed his search. A gold cigarette case! He weighed it thoughtfully in his hand; worth money, that thing. He put that, too, in an inside pocket, and next came—a diamond necklace, neatly wrapped in jeweler's tissue. The eyes of the two detectives bulged at the exquisite trifle.

"That isn't it," Bailey remarked. "The description says a garter of blue ribbon overlaid with shields of gold in which are set diamonds and rubies. It has a motto, too: '*Honey sew-it kwi mall why pen-see!*' " Rather proud of his French, was Bailey.

"It's something, anyhow," Cunningham panted, still blowing from his long run. Then, to Skeets: "Where did you get this necklace?"

"Bought it, replied the poet. "Where did you think I got it? Stole it?"

"That's just what we *do* think," was the comforting response. "It's the most natural thing in the world for a young gent who's just *bought* a diamond necklace to try to hide

in a hedge when he sees two detectives coming." Skeets opened his mouth. "Shut up!"

"There's nothing else on him," said Bailey. "Of course there wouldn't be. The garter is in that vacant house!"

"The—the what?" Skeets ventured.

"The jeweled garter."

"Garter?"

"Garter. G-a-r-double t-e-r!"

There was a walk of a mile or more back to the vacant house, and for the first time in his life Skeets found full vent for that rich vocabulary which bedecked his verse. Impartially and exhaustively he anathematized the world, the flesh, and the devil, and incontinently damned everything an inch high, with special reference to the police. Twice the detectives paused to stare at him in awe and admiration. He used some words they didn't know were in the dictionary; and some of them weren't!

An automobile was standing in front of the old mansion. It just happened that Skeets noted its number—92188. Around the house they went, stopping abruptly at a gruff:

"Who's there?"

"Bailey and Cunningham. Anything happened?"

"Nothing," replied the third detective, Fallon. "Not a sound since you went away. Ah, you got him, did you? Well, I must say if I ever saw a perfect type of a crook he's it!"

Skeets didn't ask questions now; he was no longer curious—merely looked on mechanically during that next hour as the three detectives searched the house. From attic to cellar they went, scrutinizing every inch of it by the light of their electric flashes.

In one room on the ground floor they found an old chair overturned and in the dust near by, where The Hawk had groveled, they chose to discover signs of a violent struggle.

"Ah?" said Fallon.

"Oh!" said Cunningham.

"Umph!" said Bailey. Then, to Skeets: "There were two of you, we get that. And you had some sort of a scrap here, huh? Perhaps,"—a brilliant thought came to him,—“perhaps the other fellow got the garter!”

On the broad hearth beneath a huge marble mantel they found a cigarette stub. A Regent it was! Hastily they opened Skeets' gold cigarette case—filled with Regents!

"Aha!" said Fallon.

"Oho!" said Cunningham.

"Uh huh!" said Bailey.

Wholly without interest in what they were doing, whatever it was, the poet had righted the overturned chair and sat motionless upon it, his face in his hands, glooming.

. . . Helen! What would she think? Already he was more than an hour late!

. . . After awhile these idiots would perhaps take him to a police station, and he could reach her by 'phone and explain; also he might be able to reach his father, and arrange things some way.

Bailey, his arms akimbo, came and stood directly in front of him.

"Where is that garter?" he demanded.

"Oh, piffle!" said the poet.

"Who was your accomplice?"

"Fudge!"

"You may as well tell us the truth. We have all sorts of evidence to connect you with the affair. The cigarette stub alone would convict you!"

"Prunes!" Skeets had, long since, run out of really useful words.

Ten minutes later the three detectives went back to the police station, wagging Skeets

behind 'em. Followed a conference of some sort, after which Skeets was lined up in front of the desk sergeant.

"Name?" he was asked.

"Samuel Keats Gaunt."

"Residence?"

"Eighty-first Street."

"Age?"

"Twenty-seven."

"Business?"

"Poet."

"Father's name?"

"John Gaunt."

"Do you mean John Gaunt, the millionaire coal—?" incredulously.

"The millionaire coal man," Skeets completed the sentence eagerly. There was something in the sergeant's tone, there was something now in the manner of the three detectives, that aroused a vague hope in his breast. It was the first time in his life he had ever been glad to say his father was a millionaire. After all, the power of money—

"Of course, you see this whole thing, whatever it is, is a mistake. I'm the son of a millionaire, and you see I'd have no possible object in stealing the—the garter, was

it, that was stolen? I have a very pressing engagement, so I'll go now."

"Oh, you will!" Bailey bawled at Skeets suddenly. "You'll go, will you? You, the son of John Gaunt? Why, you've just convicted yourself! We've just begun to hold you!" He turned to Cunningham and Fallon. "Don't you see?" he demanded excitedly. "It fits in perfectly with Dexter's theory—stolen garter—American millionaire—all of it—two tickets to Europe—father and son ready to jump! Say," and he whirled upon the desk sergeant, "telephone that Scotland Yard man to hike up here, quick! Tell him we can get his man in twenty minutes!" He thrust his face close into that of the poet. "Let you go!" he sneered. "Yes, we will!"

Somehow the promise failed to comfort Skeets. Submerged in an ocean of inexplicable things, he leaned wearily against the desk with his head in his hands, his gentle soul in an agony at the thought of Helen.

"Oh, shush!" he murmured at last. It was the vilest thing he could think of.

CHAPTER V

(A conversation over the telephone between S. Keats Gaunt and his father.)

"HELLO, father. This is Keats."
"Well, what do you want? What do you mean by getting me out of bed at midnight to—"

"I'm a prisoner up in The Bronx."

"Speeding again, eh? Serves you right. What are you worrying me about it for, anyway?"

"Not speeding, father. I'm charged with theft this time."

"Theft? You? What the devil are you talking about?"

"I'm accused of stealing a lady's garter."

"A lady's—what?"

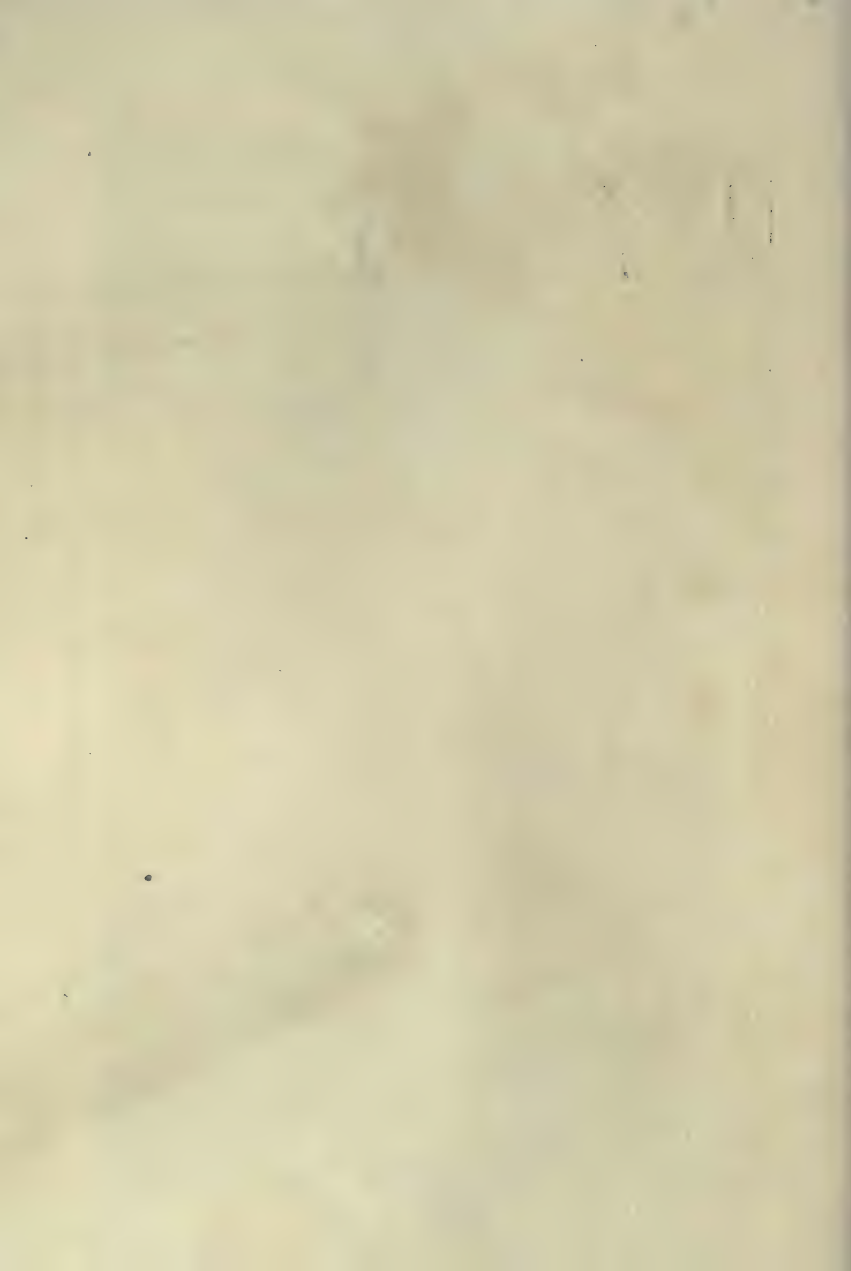
"Garter—garter—you know, the thing they use to hold up—well, anyway—"

"Great Scott! Whose garter? What garter?"

"I don't know. It seems to have been a jeweled affair of some sort; and they say it's worth twenty or twenty-five thousand dollars. I'm accused of stealing it."



Skeets was lined up in front of the desk sergeant. Page 54
My Lady's Garter



"Jumping crab apples! I've heard of men stealing money, and horses, and red-hot stoves, but I'm darned if I ever heard of a man stealing a lady's—er—what you may call it! *Did* you steal it?"

"Certainly not!"

"Did you tell 'em you didn't?"

"Yes."

"And did you tell 'em you were my son?"

"Yes. That seemed to make it worse, if anything. They refuse to believe anything I say except that I *am* your son. They believe *that* readily enough. And they won't tell me anything about anything. Can't you run up here right away and arrange bail or something, somehow?"

"A lady's—! Wha-wha-what happened, anyway?"

"Nothing particularly. I was just going along the street a while ago—it was about eleven o'clock—when two men placed me under arrest, and searched me, and took me to a vacant house and searched that; and then brought me here to the police station. I don't know what to do."

"Stealing! You! You say you told 'em you were my son?"

"Yes."

"The idiots!"

"I told 'em that, too. When I mentioned your name it seemed to convince them I *did* steal it. Now if you could run up here immediately—"

"Where are you now?"

"In the police station."

"Well, you stay right there until I come."

"I will."

"And by the way, what are *you* doing up in The Bronx at this time of night?"

A pause.

"I—say—what—are—you—doing—up—in—The—Bronx—at—this—time—of—night?"

"Well—er—I came up about—er—a little affair of my—my own."

"Affair of your own, eh? Brokaw Hamilton lives up there somewhere, doesn't he? Oh, yes he does, too! So that's it? You've been calling on that red-headed daughter of his! Yes, you have! Don't argue with me! I won't have it!"

"Father, I give you my word of honor I haven't seen Helen to-night. If you could come up—"

"Oh, well, in that case! I'll be along in a little while."

(*A conversation over the telephone between S. Keats Gaunt and Helen Hamilton.*)

"Is—is that you, Helen?"

"Yes."

"This is Keats."

"Well, for goodness sake! What became of you? Where've you been? I've been waiting and waiting and waiting! Where are you now?"

"Locked up in a police station."

"Skeets Gaunt! Locked up in—! What are you talking about?"

"That's why I didn't come. I was on my way—"

"Why are you locked up?"

"I'm accused of stealing a lady's garter, and—"

"Why—Skeets—Gaunt!"

"I didn't, darling; I didn't. I don't know a thing about it. Please, now, listen just a minute, and I'll—"

"I never *heard* of such a thing! A lady's—"

"Just a moment, sweetheart. Let me explain."

"What were *you* doing with the—with *it*?"

"I didn't have it. I haven't it now. I don't know a thing about it. I never saw

it. When they searched me all they found was a diamond necklace I had bought for you. You see—”

“If you didn’t have the—the—*it*, why were you arrested?”

“It’s a mistake, dearest. They thought I stole it, so they—”

“Well, it seems very strange to *me* that they should arrest *you* if you didn’t have *some* connection with it.”

“But, darling, you don’t think—”

“I don’t think any one would be so stupid as to arrest a *perfectly innocent* man for a thing like *that!* Whose was it?”

“I don’t know. It’s—”

“Stole a lady’s—er—garter, and you don’t know whose? Indeed! Where did they catch you?”

“In the street just a block from your house. I was on my way—”

“And pray what were you doing in the street a block off? I didn’t send you out for a promenade. I sent you to the barn for a ladder.”

“Ladder? What ladder?”

“So I could come down from my window, of course. And instead of getting the ladder and coming straight back you leave my bag

and my *best hat* on the damp ground and go out for a stroll!"

"I haven't the faintest idea what—"

"It wouldn't surprise me a bit if you *did* steal the—the *thing!* And when you were arrested what did you do with *my* jewels, pray? Are they still in your pocket?"

"*Your* jewels? I haven't seen them."

"Do you mean to deny that I dropped them to you out of my window, and asked you to put them in your pocket?"

"I don't know what—"

"A lady's garter—! I'll trouble you to return my jewels immediately."

"But, Helen, I—"

"Also, I've changed my mind about everything else. I won't elope with you at all. I'm glad I found you out in time. Indeed, I am!"

"But, dear heart—"

"And we will dispense with all that mush, if you please. You will return my jewels to me immediately. I think that is all. Good-by, forever!"

"But you didn't *give* me your jewels. I haven't seen them."

"*Why—Skeets—Gaunt!*"

"And you never spoke to me in your life

about a ladder; and I don't know anything about your bag, and your best hat on the damp ground, and going out for a promenade. And you certainly *didn't* give me your jewels and ask me to put them in my pocket."

"I did!"

"You didn't!"

"Did!"

"Didn't!"

"Did!"

"Oh, dammit!"

"*Skee-ee-eets Gaunt!*"

CHAPTER VI

INDIGNANT beyond the power of speech, Helen banged the receiver of the telephone into place, and turned, to find herself facing her father. He stood in the doorway, motionless, white, haggard; he wore an automobile cap and raincoat, both dripping water. Instantly on the defensive, the girl glared at him rebelliously for a moment, then started out.

"I heard your conversation," he remarked.

"I don't care if you did!" she flashed, pausing, her cheeks aflame with anger. "I don't care!"

Silently her father laid aside his wet outer garments and extended his arms toward her. After a moment she crept into them, her lips quivering, and tears starting in her eyes. She winked them back savagely, and then—the deluge. With no word of comfort, nor yet a word of reproof, Brokaw Hamilton stood with set face, holding the slender, trembling figure for a long time, until at last the storm passed and his daughter lay still.

"I *did* love him," she burst out passionately, "and when you wouldn't give your consent it broke my heart and I *was* going

to elope with him. He came under my window about eleven o'clock, and I dropped down my bag to him and my jew-jewels, and my bub-bub-best hat. And now he says I didn't give him the jew-jewels at all; and it's raining cats and dogs, and my bub-bub-best hat is out there on the ground getting wet."

Tenderly, apparently in deep preoccupation, her father stroked her rebellious hair. "Red as a geranium," she had said. 'Twas red, but it was the rich redness of the dying sun. . . . How came Skeets Gaunt entangled in this affair of the jeweled garter?

"I just hate him and his old pup-pup-poetry," Helen sobbed on fiercely. "'O Helen, thy hair is an aura of—' Fiddlesticks! And, Pops, he said 'Dammit' at me right there, just a second ago. And he has my jewels, and he won't give them up; and he has stolen somebody's gar-gar-garter; and he's locked up in a cell, and I'm glad of it—so there! Horrid thing! I hope he *never* gets out!"

"Knowing my objections, still you were going to marry him?" asked Brokaw Hamilton.

"Yes, I was," belligerently.

"And you love him so much?"

"I don't love him at all, now! I—I hate him! I wouldn't marry him, Pops, I wouldn't marry him if he was the last man on earth."

Tenderness passed from her father's eyes, and instead a flame glowed there. It was the old hatred of John Gaunt, and John Gaunt's son, and all that was John Gaunt's!

When he spoke his voice was quiet, as before.

"Your mother, of course, was not in your confidence?"

"Mother?" Helen gasped. "No!"

"Well, we won't say anything about anything to her—either of us. This will be our secret." He gathered the girl close, close in his arms, and stared into the fathomless blue eyes. "And it's all over now, isn't it?"

With her white teeth closed tightly on her trembling under lip, Helen nodded vigorously, then in a quick rush of emotion kissed her father. For a long time he stood staring into nothingness; suddenly his manner changed.

"You dropped your jewels out the window to him?"

"Yes, and told him to put them in his pocket. Now he has the—the unspeakable nerve to say I didn't give them to him at all."

"There is some misunderstanding here, of

course," he assured her. "I'll run over to the police station and see what can be done. Young Gaunt can't be a thief."

"But, Pops, he's arrested for stealing a—a—he's arrested already."

"Some misunderstanding," he repeated abstractedly. "Off to bed with you now, girly; I'll see what can be done."

"Good night!" She slid out of his arms and went trailing up the stairs. He watched her until she turned at the top and blew him a kiss, then stepped into the hall and spoke to a gaping footman, Dawkins.

"Order the limousine, at once," he directed.

Dawkins vanished noiselessly. In addition to utter weariness there was bewilderment in Brokaw Hamilton's face as he passed into the dining room, and poured out a stiff glass of whisky. Abstractedly he gazed into the amber depths for a moment, and then:

"It may be, after all, that a marriage of the daughter of the house of Hamilton to the son of the house of Gaunt is the thing most to be desired. . . . In the end it would make me the financial king of America; his fortune and mine together! . . . But I can't imagine how young Gaunt came to be

under arrest for stealing the Countess of Salisbury's garter!"

Two famous enemies in the money world came face to face when John Gaunt and Brokaw Hamilton met in the police station. John Gaunt, in his masterful way, had bullied the story of the attempted elopement out of poor Skeets, and was consequently in a rage. Then, too, he had been made to feel uncomfortable under the curious scrutiny of the desk sergeant, and of Bailey, and Cunningham, and Fallon. Another man was there as well, a close-mouthed, English-looking person—Dexter, they called him—with eyes like gimlets; and there was sheer insolence in the way he looked the millionaire over.

Brokaw Hamilton came in, calm, cold as marble, and as white. He faced John Gaunt unemotionally, with a slight, disdainful uplift of the corners of his mouth. It was the crafty collie sneering at the giant mastiff!

The desk sergeant recognized Mr. Hamilton and nodded obsequiously.

"I understand a young man, Samuel Keats Gaunt, is under arrest here?" Brokaw Hamilton began.

"Yes, sir," was the courteous reply. "He is charged with the theft of a jeweled garter."

"I don't care anything about that," said the railroad magnate impatiently. "Was he searched when he was brought in?"

"He has been searched, yes."

"Any jewels found on him?"

"Not the garter, sir. There was a diamond necklace, but we don't know *who* he stole *that* from."

John Gaunt went off with a roar like a thirteen-inch gun. Mr. Hamilton glanced around at him as if astonished, then turned back to the sergeant.

"After his arrest he would have had no opportunity to conceal a jewel case anywhere" he continued placidly.

"No," was the emphatic response. "Why do you ask? Do you suspect him?"

John Gaunt strode forward and planted himself directly in front of his old enemy. Flames of anger blazed in his eyes; his mighty fists were clenched.

"What is it you want?" he demanded abruptly, "No business of yours, is it. Why are you butting in? Isn't it enough that your daughter tried to—"

"That will do," Mr. Hamilton interrupted quietly.

"—that your daughter would have—"

"That will do, I said!" Mr. Hamilton repeated. His tone was still quiet, but there was danger in the very velvet of it. "We are not a couple of longshoremen, you know, to stand here and swap Billingsgate. Fifty thousand dollars' worth of jewels belonging to my daughter have been stolen. I'm trying to find them."

The effect of the statement upon the desk sergeant and the detectives was electrical. Even the English-looking person was stirred to speech.

"By Jove, you know!" he said.

"And I suppose you're going to say that my son—*my son*—stole them, eh?" John Gaunt sneered.

Brokaw Hamilton's eyes narrowed, and a faint flush mounted to his pallid face. For perhaps a minute there was tense silence, the detectives waiting, waiting, for—what they didn't know, the two millionaires staring straight into each other's eyes. Finally, Brokaw Hamilton's gaze shifted to the desk sergeant.

"I want to add a charge to the charge that

already stands against Samuel Keats Gaunt," he said coldly. "I charge him with the theft, to-night, within the last hour, of fifty thousand dollars' worth of jewels belonging to my daughter!"

Science tells us that two loud noises will sometimes make silence. That must have been what was the matter with John Gaunt. Two bellows of indignant amazement tried to escape at once with the result that he was perfectly dumb—dumb with his mouth open.

"My daughter, Helen," Hamilton's voice flowed on levelly, "gave them into his keeping. Now, I understand he denies it. There can only be one conclusion—he stole them."

John Gaunt's face went purple; spasmodically he reached forward to take this man by the throat. Sheer will power brought control.

"Sergeant, if you'll send a couple of your men home with me," Mr. Hamilton went on serenely, "my daughter will be pleased to give them all the necessary details. And, by the way, that diamond necklace you found on the prisoner can't be my daughter's property. She doesn't own one. Good night."

The door opened and closed; he was gone. Trailing after him went detectives Cunningham and Fallon.

A minute later John Gaunt, too, went out. Detective Bailey glanced quickly, interrogatively, at Dexter as John Gaunt moved toward the door, and Dexter had nodded. In the tumult of rage which possessed him, the millionaire coal man had forgotten all about poor Skeets, tucked away in a cell with ear pressed to the steel bars, hopefully waiting.

"He won't run away, of course," Dexter remarked in his heavy English way, "and besides, we've nothing to hold him on yet. You know we're conducting this case like a lot of bally asses—what? We do these things better in Scotland Yard, you know. We don't stand on the housetops and shout about everything we learn as you chaps seem to do over here."

John Gaunt's automobile swung away into the night in a torrent of rain.

"Brokaw Hamilton knows perfectly well Sammy didn't steal any jewels," he informed the outer darkness with a graceful touch of profanity here and there. "He simply couldn't resist the temptation to poke it into me." A long silence. "Probably thinks that red-headed daughter of his is too good for my son! If I thought he *really* thought that I'd—I'd—hang it, I'd *make* Sammy marry her,

just to spite him!" Another silence. "Might not be a bad idea at that! If they *should* marry! His fortune and mine! I'd be the financial boss of the earth! Look out there!"

This last as the automobile skidded and went sliding across the slushy road toward a foot traveler who was plodding along in the rain. Agility alone saved him from injury. It was The Hawk!

It was after two o'clock when Brokaw Hamilton retired to his room. The detectives had gone and Helen's turbulent heart had found peace in sleep.

"Helen loves young Gaunt, therefore she would be as happy with him as with any one else." Business of donning pajamas. "Besides insuring her happiness I'd place myself in a position to—! Say, John Gaunt is worth a hundred millions; and he's a child! I could get that! And if I don't, some one else will!" Business of crawling into bed. "It may have been a bad beginning to accuse young Gaunt of stealing those jewels, but—Perhaps not!" Business of closing his eyes. "How can that young idiot know anything about this affair of the Countess of Salisbury's garter? I'll have to have my own detective on this!"

CHAPTER VII

SKEETS GAUNT is safe in his cell and he will keep—or be kept, to state it more accurately. So let's away from the vagaries of night and the mysteries that lie in the pall of it. Let's take Broadway at eight o'clock of a sunny morning in June. The sidewalks, drenched by the heavy rains of the night before, are glistening spotlessly beneath the million-footed human creature which is hurrying here, there, everywhere to the pursuits of the day; the street is an endless, counter-flowing stream of vehicles divided mathematically by the car tracks.

Here we are at Forty-second Street. Let's pause a minute to watch the tides of humanity from east and west swirl into unique Broadway to be swallowed up in the vaster stream which flows forever north and south. A mottled current it is, burdened with the flotsam and jetsam of the world—bankers and beggars, and brokers and stokers; newsboys and venders, and street-crossing tenders; hook-nosed and snub, honest men and thieves. The ever-flowing stream ripples on, borrowing a dash of color from the bright gowns and

gossamer millinery of the shop girls. In no city in the world is the shop girl so well dressed as in New York.

Somewhere in this hurrying, jostling crowd is The Hawk. Ah, there he is, scrubby of beard, pallid of face, worn and weary, but for all that there is a glint of satisfaction in his shallow eyes. A hard night he has had of it, evidently—a night in the rain, for his threadbare coat is still wet, and there is a disheartening squashiness in his tattered shoes. He is hungry, too, in spite of the fact that his shabby pockets hold a fortune of seventy-five thousand dollars, more or less, in other people's jewels.

Six years it had been since The Hawk had seen Broadway—six long, meager years—and now he reveled in the sight of it. His destination was Daddy Heinz' in West Thirtieth Street; and Daddy Heinz' was a sanctuary where he would find breakfast, and a bath, and clean linen, and a bed. The nearest route to all these luxuries was down Seventh Avenue, but The Hawk didn't go that way. Instead, he stuck to Broadway; there was so much of it new to him. Good old Broadway! The smell of it got up his nose. It was worth while living, if one might live here!

So, on down Broadway he went, past the yawning entrance of the Metropolitan Opera House, past the Marlborough, past the Herald Building. At Thirty-fourth Street he paused suddenly with quick interest, and stared. A girl had attracted his attention—a red-headed girl! Something in the way the brilliant sunlight struck her hair reminded him of the vision in the window the night before—Her Loveliness!—and he stopped to look after her until she was swallowed up in the crowd. He knew it couldn't be the same; he was merely humoring a recollection.

Woman, and the lure of her, had never entered into The Hawk's scheme of existence. He had regarded her merely as a sort of subliminated clotheshorse, much given to the vain adorning of her white body with ribbons and laces and fluffy things—and jewels! There's where his interest in women had always begun and ended—at the jewels. But "in the spring a young man's fancy"—and all the rest of it; and it was June. For no reason apparent to himself The Hawk realized all at once that now he was regarding woman from a different angle. This new point of view had been born at that instant when, crouching against a wall in the darkness,

he had caught one glimpse—only one!—of her whom he was pleased to think of as Her Loveliness! A wonderful night it had been, truly—a night filled with all the delightful irresponsibilities of a fairy tale. Ah, me!

But hunger pressed; eyes smarted from lack of sleep; limbs trembled with weariness. Turning suddenly, The Hawk continued straight on down Broadway to Thirtieth Street, where he steered west. Beyond Sixth Avenue, where two great green lamps squatted on their supports, was the new Tenderloin Police Station. It was The Hawk's first sight of it; a decided improvement on the old one. There were men inside, among them probably Detective Meredith, who would have given five years of their lives to lay hands on The Hawk. The Hawk knew it; so he smiled pleasantly.

Across Sixth Avenue, under the "L" he went on, silently appreciative of the roar of good old New York. While he was still a hundred feet or so away from the sinister front of the police station the door opened, and—Detective Meredith came out! Detective Meredith! The Hawk's nearest, dearest, most intimate enemy! A dozen times they had matched their wit each against the other

in the old days, and at the end Meredith had been one of the best young yelpers in that pack of the law's bloodhounds that had chased The Hawk into oblivion.

The Hawk was glad to see Meredith. He would have liked to go up and introduce himself, and shake hands with him. It was the first familiar face he had seen. Yet if there was one man in the world he had to fear it was Detective Meredith. And now The Hawk felt there was no need to invite disaster. Despite the great change in his own appearance, despite the time that had elapsed since his vanishing, The Hawk knew that discretion was the better part of valor.

Already he had turned back toward Sixth Avenue when he saw a huge limousine swing around the corner and pull up in front of the police station. It stopped, and a middle-aged man alighted. He was followed immediately by a girl. When The Hawk saw her his heart stood still. It was Her Loveliness—the girl of the window! He knew by the tilt of her head, by the radiance of her brick-red hair—intuitively he knew her. She had come with her father, of course, to consult Meredith, the best of the metropolitan detectives, in connection with the loss of

her jewels, the jewels he carried now in one of his shabby pockets.

There is a distinct difference between daredeviltry and bravery. The dare-devil is he who doesn't realize a danger; the brave man is he who faces a known peril. The Hawk, knowing his peril, knowing he risked that liberty he had taken such pains to assure; knowing that the keen eyes of Meredith were not to be trifled with—knowing all these things, he turned his back on Sixth Avenue and slouched on unsteadily toward the police station. It was the lure of woman that led him, the desire to hear her voice again, to see her at close range in broad daylight. Perchance she would smile, and that would be worth all the risk; perhaps—some definite idea flickered through his mind and his lips curled curiously.

Brokaw Hamilton, his daughter, and Detective Meredith stood on the police-station steps in earnest conversation. Obviously they were waiting for some one. Came along a drooping, weary-eyed, bedraggled, unshaven, whining creature, with trembling, outstretched hand.

"Please, gentlemen—lady," he croaked, "a few pennies to save me from starving."

"Go on, now!" ordered the detective.
"Get out of this."

"I beg pardon, sir," whined The Hawk.
"I thought perhaps—"

"Well, for a beggar you *have* got a nerve," Meredith declared sharply. Many truths are spoken in jest; and many more in ignorance. "Begging at a police station! Go on—fade away—up an alley!"

"Why, sir, is this a police station?" The Hawk queried in humble amazement.

"What does it look like? A candy store? Beat it—on your way!"

The Hawk's shallow eyes met those of the girl eagerly, greedily. They were blue, blue, blue—the blue of a moon-lit sky; compassionate, sympathetic—just such eyes as he had known she would have. Her hand moved toward her pocketbook.

"Don't give him anything, Miss Hamilton," advised the detective. "It only encourages 'em."

"But the poor fellow may actually be hungry," Helen protested. "He looks hungry."

"I am, Miss," The Hawk assured her; which statement, at least, possessed the merit of truth.

Helen produced a coin and dropped it into his palm; and The Hawk shot a quick, curious glance at his old-time enemy.

"On your way," Meredith commanded. "You've got it. And look here, young fellow, see that you keep away from police stations. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"What are you grinning about?"

"Was I grinning, sir?"

A uniformed man came out of the station house and spoke to Meredith, after which the little party entered the building. Twice on his way west in Thirtieth Street The Hawk stopped and laughed. Once, it was a laugh of sheer joy—he had seen Her Loveliness again; he held tightly clutched in one hand the half dollar she had given him; and most marvelous of all, her eyes were blue, blue, blue! And once he laughed because he had outfaced his dearest enemy. If he had ever feared Meredith that fear was gone now. Meredith was beginning the search for the missing jewels, and here they had been under his hand, in possession of a man whom he had sought the world over. And the fact that Meredith had just ordered him to keep away from police stations appealed to The

Hawk's sense of humor. It would be almost worth while to go up to Meredith and introduce himself, just to see the expression on his face!

Ten minutes later The Hawk, apparently on familiar ground, inserted a curiously fashioned key into the lock of a door and tried it tentatively. It worked, and he slid through, conscious instantly of the fact that the opening of the door had sounded an electric buzz somewhere in the rear. Along the hall he went, certain of his way, turning into a room at his left. It was bare, save for a decrepit chair or table here and there, and a vividly green sofa in a corner. A singular odor pervaded the place, a sort of mustiness that one always associates with antique shops.

Perhaps a minute passed, then from the back came Daddy Heinz, the most adroit "fence" and generally accomplished old crook New York ever sheltered. He was bent, hook-nosed, bearded, evil-eyed; the tattered dressing gown he wore dragged at his heels. He tottered into the room, peering about him expectantly. At length his gaze settled on The Hawk, reflecting the vague fear which an unfamiliar face always inspired.

"Well, Daddy?" greeted The Hawk.
"Don't you know me?"

For a space longer the old man stared. Some chord of memory vibrated at the sound of the voice. Finally, incredulously:

"The Hawk!"

"You got me."

"The Hawk!" the old man mumbled, and one shriveled hand grasped the younger man's. "I'm glad to see you, boy. I had heard that you were dead. Where have you been? Where do you come from now? The Hawk!" A golden vision opened up before the fading eyes. "The Hawk back in New York!"

"Back in New York." The Hawk laughed charmingly. "I'm sorry I didn't have time to tell you good-by six years ago, but I was in a hurry."

Daddy Heinz' thin lips writhed into a smile and he rubbed his hands together greedily. Magnificent *coups* there had been in the old days when The Hawk had been at his best; and luscious profits to share between them. And now The Hawk was back! His evil old heart warmed at the promise of prosperity ahead. The Hawk's whole manner changed.

"Anybody at all in the house?"

"No."

"Well, nobody — *nobody*, you understand — must know I'm here, that I'm back in New York, that I'm even alive. You heard I was dead. Let me stay dead. Now listen a minute. I'm all in. I haven't slept for thirty-six hours, and I walked eighteen miles in all that rain last night. First, I want breakfast. I'll take a plunge while you're fixing it. Then I want sleep — lots of it. And while I'm sleeping — look here a moment."

From the depths of a pocket he produced a small crumpled-up paper and unfolding it displayed a diamond — a single unset stone. Daddy Heinz' eyes glittered as he stretched out a bony, grasping hand for it; and as he twisted and turned it in his fingers there came a startled, wondering expression into his face.

"That stone is nearly five carats," The Hawk told him crisply. He either didn't see or chose not to notice anything strange in the old man's manner. "It's blue white and beautifully cut. It's worth somewhere between two and three thousand dollars at the least."

"Where — where did you get it?" Daddy

Heinz quavered. There was an undercurrent of excitement in his manner.

"Why?" demanded The Hawk abruptly. "What does it matter?"

"Nothing only—only—it's clean, is it?"

"You know it's clean," replied The Hawk. "I don't kill people; I merely steal. Why did you ask that?"

"No reason at all," the old man hastened to assure him. "It's such a beautiful stone, that's all. I was wondering; and I wouldn't handle a stone of that size if it had blood on it."

Whatever emotion had swayed him it was all gone now, hidden behind a venerable mask of dissimulation. For half a minute The Hawk continued to stare at him curiously, then:

"While I'm asleep I want you to do some things for me," he directed tersely. "I want clothes—good clothes—the clothes of a gentleman—everything from shoes to hats. I want money—a thousand dollars in cash at least, and during the next ten days I'll want more of it, bunches of it. I've ample security. That's all now. And remember, Daddy, The Hawk is dead; deader than you ever thought he could be. Now hustle me

up a beefsteak about as big as that table top. Me for the bathtub." He turned toward the door, on his way upstairs. "Oh, let me see your gun a minute."

From the voluminous folds of his antiquated dressing gown Daddy Heinz produced a revolver.

The Hawk spun the barrel in his fingers, and examined the priming.

"Thanks," he said. "I'll keep it."

The Hawk slept, and sleeping, dreamed. He was crouching close against a wall in the dark, and the most beautiful woman in the world was emptying a hat box of diamonds over his head. . . . On a table beside his bed the revolver lay, cocked. Of such a breed as this was his faith in Daddy Heinz!

Meanwhile that venerable old crook, with a magnifying glass screwed into one of his evil eyes, was turning and twisting the unset diamond in his claw-like fingers.

"If," he remarked after a long silence, "if that isn't one of the diamonds from the Countess of Salisbury's garter I'll eat it." He cackled dryly. "But how did it fall into the hands of The Hawk? I wonder—I wonder if Brokaw Hamilton could have—?"

CHAPTER VIII

WHILE The Hawk was catching up on his beauty sleep two mighty forces were actively, albeit unconsciously, at work lightening the clouds which had curdled the happiness of Skeets Gaunt. These two forces were the police and the press.

Brokaw Hamilton needed only one glimpse of the afternoon newspapers to convince him that he had set in motion an avalanche of notoriety about the ears of his daughter. He himself didn't mind an avalanche or two—he was used to them; but he was annoyed on her account. It may have been, too, that vague considerations growing out of his newborn wish to control the Gaunt millions influenced him when he withdrew the absurd charge of theft he had made against Skeets.

"Why did you withdraw it?" demanded the ubiquitous newspaper reporter.

"The jewels have been found," was the reply.

"Where?"

"Really, it was of no consequence," et cetera.

"When?"

"The public had no interest," et cetera.

"Who had 'em?"

"No good end would be served," et cetera.

"Let's see 'em."

"Really, he must decline," et cetera.

Even newspaper reporters don't believe all they hear. In the beginning they had been asked to swallow a yarn to the effect that S. Keats Gaunt, son of a millionaire, a semi-famous poet rich in his own right, had led Helen Hamilton, sole heiress of another millionaire, to think he was going to elope with her, all this with the one purpose of stealing her jewels, worth a paltry fifty thousand dollars. Credulity balked at that. Now came Brokaw Hamilton's bald statement that the jewels had been found; and coupled therewith was a refusal to say when or where; also a refusal to produce them.

Mr. Hamilton was surprised, amazed! Why, gentlemen, did not the press believe his statement? No, the press did not. Pooh! Pooh! sneered the press. This last yarn was worse than the first. So the avalanche thundered on.

Possibly the crux of the thing lay in that jeweled garter! Investigation along this line brought the newspaper men up against a

stone wall of reticence. Whose garter was it? No one would say. From whom had it been stolen? Same answer. When? Ditto. Where? Likewise. How? Also. Why had Skeets Gaunt been arrested for the theft? Echo answered, "Why?" Detective Meredith, now in charge of the case, looked as wise as a dog who has just hidden a bone, and said—nothing! His assistants were equally voluble.

At just about this point the press discovered an English-looking person who seemed to be loitering around in the background of the mystery. Some one discovered that his name was Dexter. Who was *he*? How did *he* figure in it, if at all? Did *he* know anything about anything? Really, old chaps, he didn't have a blessed word to say, you know! A jolly inquisitive lot they were, to be sure! So these were American reporters! His word! He'd have to drop a line to *The Times* about it, eh, what?

Remained to the press one lonely crumb of consolation. When Skeets Gaunt came to be arraigned in police court for a preliminary hearing the charges against him would have to be made specific. All this secrecy and fiddle-fuddle would have to make way for

cold facts. Knowing this, the newspaper men possessed their souls in comparative patience.

But Skeets Gaunt was not arraigned in police court. The charge of the theft of the garter was mysteriously withdrawn! The incident was closed. By the time the reporters discovered this, Skeets had been released and had gone his way.

Thus the situation at three o'clock on the day following the poet's arrest. John Gaunt, in his office, was absorbing all these details from a very extra special extra midnight extra edition of an extra afternoon newspaper, when the door opened and Skeets himself strode in, his poetic eye rolling in fine frenzy; and it wasn't the frenzy of genius, either! His father swung around in his swivel chair and scowled at him.

"I've just had a conversation over the telephone with Brokaw Hamilton," John Gaunt began without preliminary.

"I don't care," Skeets raged. "That isn't what I want to talk about. You left me in that cell all last night and to-day, and—"

"Now, Sammy, keep your shirt on. I—"

"Not Sammy, please, father."

"Samuel, then." It was a concession. The poet was made to feel that it was.

"Now, don't disarrange your linen while I talk to you a minute. I've just had a conversation—"

"You could have put up a cash bond, and—"

"I've just had a conversation over the telephone with Brokaw Hamilton," John Gaunt repeated, doggedly. "He called me a coal heaver. *A coal heaver!* Do you understand that?"

"You could have put up a cash—"

"He said he had objected to his daughter's marriage to you just as he would have objected to her marriage to the son of any *other* coal heaver, meaning me."

"You could have put up—"

"Now, Sammy—"

"Not Sammy, *please*, father!"

"I beg your pardon—Samuel. He called you the son of a coal heaver!"

"You could have put up—"

"In other words, you're not good enough for that red-headed, turned-up-nose daughter of his. You! Do you get that? Gaunt blood *isn't good enough!*"

"You could have put up—" The phrase came monotonously, truculently, like the breaking of angry waves against rocks.

"Now it's up to us—me and you—it's a debt we owe ourselves to pay him for his insolence. Not good enough! A coal heaver! Gaunt blood not good enough! Now, Sammy—"

"Not Sammy, *please*, father!"

"Samuel," John Gaunt corrected himself graciously. "Keats, my son," he flattered, "the Gaunts always pay their debts; we'll pay this." He tilted back in his swivel chair and regarded the poet shrewdly. "You know some day, Sammy—Keats!—some day I'm going to die, and when I do there'll be several million dollars that I won't be able to take along with me. Would you like to have those millions?"

"You could have put up some of 'em—"

"Or," John Gaunt pursued evenly, "or would you prefer that I give those millions to establish a fund for the purpose of buying pajamas and standing collars for the Fiji Islanders? I'm making a proposition. Do you get me?"

"You could have put up—"

"Hamilton says Gaunt blood isn't good enough. You can get those millions in one way, and *only* one way! You can get them by *marrying Helen Hamilton!*"

The poet's angry heart was stilled for an instant with joy! Helen! Had he heard aright? Was his father now consenting to that alliance against which he had raised such thunderous objections?

"Father!" It was all he could say.

"Not a word! I won't listen! That's the proposition. Take it or leave it. You marry Helen Hamilton and you get my millions, and perhaps some of his along with 'em; if you don't marry her, then it's pajamas and high collars for the Fiji Islanders. Gaunt blood not good enough, eh? I'm a coal heaver, am I? You're the son of a coal heaver, are you? Well, we'll just introduce a dash of coal heaver's blood into his family and see how he likes it!"

"Do I understand that, after all, I may marry Helen?" Skeets' voice was tremulous with emotion.

"*May?*" roared John Gaunt. Why, dammit, you've *got* to! And not a word of objection out of you; no, not a word! I don't care how or where, but do it—and do it soon. I guess maybe that won't get the Hamilton goat!"

All the bitterness engendered by his recent misfortunes vanished from the heart of

Skeets; there remained only the great gladness of adoration.

"I—I don't know how to thank you!" he stammered; and after a little he went his way, treading on air.

An English-looking person, Dexter by name, was in earnest conversation with two other men in the corridor of the great skyscraper as Skeets passed out into the street.

"That's the son," he told them. "Never mind him. It's the father we want. He must not move twenty feet unless one of you is along. It may come down to searching his home. He knows the answer to this riddle of the garter, and he's the only one who does. He knows where the garter's been and he knows where it is now. But we must catch him red-handed. Those are the orders from Scotland Yard."

Half submerged in flaming headed afternoon newspapers, Brokaw Hamilton sat at the big desk in his study, staring coldly into the rebellious eyes of his daughter. He had commanded her presence peremptorily.

"This has been a most unfortunate affair, Helen," he began at last, gravely.

"Well, I should say as much," she assented hotly. "Did you see that snapshot of me in one of the papers? With a last year's hat on? And my mouth open? It looked just like a fish!"

"Unfortunately you are involved in this mare's nest which some one has discovered. The notoriety," and he waved a hand toward the newspapers, "is extremely distasteful to both your mother and myself. I'm afraid it's impossible to put an end to it, but we can do the next best thing and get you away from it."

"You mean go to Newport? So early?"

"Not Newport, nor Bar Harbor, nor Narragansett, nor Lenox—not even Europe. To-morrow morning you and your mother will take one maid and disappear into some quiet little place that nobody ever heard of, and you will remain there, hidden as it were, until the unpleasant features of this—until the hurrah has subsided."

Helen stared at him resignedly.

"I know the sort of place you mean," she said; "some poky little old hole where—where— Oh, well! My heart is broken, anyway. I don't suppose it matters—nothing matters much."

"You are to leave no address behind you with any one," her father continued, heedless of her tone. "Your identity, your name even, is to be different." Helen glanced up at him in bewilderment. "You understand? You are to take another name and use it until you come back to New York. It's the only way to get rid of the newspaper men."

Helen's heart may have been broken—I don't know, I'm sure—but I do know that her eyes sparkled suddenly, and her rosy lips rippled into a smile; and she clasped her hands ecstatically. I say, her heart may have been broken, but she was an unconventional girl and perhaps she expressed her emotions in unconventional ways.

"Oh, Pops, won't that be corking? I'll be Cicely—Cicely Somebody-or-other. I just hate Helen, anyway. Helen! It always sounded to me like a long-legged, thin, slick-haired sort of person. Cicely! That sounds more like me, doesn't it?"

Brokaw Hamilton chose not to notice the ebullition.

"The ultimate consequences of this affair may be more—more—er—serious than we now suppose," he went on. "At any rate,

it is better that you and your mother should be away from it all. And that covers that."

Idly he picked up the mummied foot of the Egyptian princess and scrutinized it much as if he had never seen it before. He had something else to say, and he didn't know where to begin. Helen shuddered a little.

"Do put down that horrid thing!" she commanded. "It gives me the wiggles! The idea of handling dead peoples' feet like that!"

"You've seen the afternoon papers, of course?" Brokaw Hamilton queried irrelevantly.

"Yes, and they were horrid, too. That snapshot of me with my mouth open!"

"Therefore I don't have to tell you that I've withdrawn the charge I made against young Gaunt?"

"I noticed you had," disdainfully.

"Also, the charge of stealing the jeweled garter has been withdrawn."

"*Withdrawn*, yes, but I wouldn't be a *bit* surprised if he *did* steal—"

"It's absurd to suppose young Gaunt is a thief. Somebody else got your jewels when you dropped them. I have a private

detective looking into that now." He paused and lifted his eyes curiously to Helen's face. "Now that you know young Gaunt is free of suspicion, I daresay you—you still—still love him?"

"I hate him!"—promptly.

"Hate him? Why?"

"Oh, because."

"Because what?"

"Just because."

"But—but that's no reason." Brokaw Hamilton gazed at her in astonishment. He knew all about the railroad business, too! "You know he's innocent?"

"No reason! Huh! I'd like to hear a better one."

"Suppose—suppose—" and her father spoke slowly, measuredly, "—suppose I should withdraw my opposition to your marriage with young Gaunt?"

"It wouldn't make the slightest difference in the world to me," Helen replied coolly. "I wouldn't marry him if he was the last man living! Horrid thing!"

"Suppose," her father insisted, "suppose I should want you to marry him?"

Helen's eyes opened wide. It didn't occur to her as being curious that her father should

alter so completely his attitude toward young Gaunt; but it did occur to her as curious that he might want her to do something she had said she didn't want to do.

"Why?" she asked in turn.

"Suppose," he went on steadily, and his cold eyes were searching her face, "that I should insist that you marry him?"

"Why, Pops, I don't—"

"Suppose I should say that you *must* marry him?"

"Must!" The word aroused every instinct of rebellion in her. She was not the sort of young person to whom one might say "must" and get away with it. "Why, I wouldn't marry him—"

"He's innocent, understand," her father urged. "Last night you would have eloped with him; to-day—your attitude is inconsistent. If you did love him, you do love him. If he should discover where you are to spend the summer, and—"

"I won't have him!" she declared hotly. "I won't! I won't! I won't! And I think you're a mean, horrid old thing, so there!"

She left him there, a much bewildered man.

One of Brokaw Hamilton's trains, propelled

by a motive force generated by John Gaunt's coal, was, at this psychological moment, bearing a personal representative of the Secretary of State from the city of Washington to the city of New York. His errand in the metropolis was a curious one. It was to request the Associated Press and the newspapers generally to refrain from further mention of the jeweled garter, and the mystery surrounding it. This unusual request followed closely upon a long interview between the British ambassador and the President of the United States.

CHAPTER IX

THE clock struck nine. From a drawer of the big desk in his study Brokaw Hamilton took a revolver, and having made sure it was loaded, thrust it into an outside pocket of the dust coat he wore. He pulled an automobile cap down over his head, and passed into the hall.

"I may not return until after midnight," he told the footman, Dawkins. "It won't be necessary for any one to wait up for me. I have a latchkey."

The footman nodded and the railroad magnate went on down the steps. His motor was waiting.

"Eighth Avenue and Thirtieth Street," he directed the chauffeur. "It's nine o'clock now. I must be there by half-past nine."

He stepped inside and the car moved away silently into the night. It was thirty-two minutes past nine when the motor drew up beside a curb, and Brokaw Hamilton alighted.

"That's all," he said. "I won't need you again to-night."

For a time, until the red tail light of the automobile disappeared in the direction of

uptown, he stood thoughtfully gazing after it, then, abruptly, he turned the corner and went along West Thirtieth Street. Over near Sixth Avenue, where two great green lamps squatted on their supports, was the new Tenderloin Police Station. Brokaw Hamilton, apparently on familiar ground, inserted a curiously fashioned key into the lock of a door; and somewhere an electric buzz sounded. Along the hall he went, certain of his way, turning into a room at his left. It was bare, save for a decrepit chair or table here and there, and a vividly green sofa in a corner.

A door opened, and Daddy Heinz tottered in, peering about him curiously, and rubbing his withered old hands together.

"Ah, Mr. Hamilton," he greeted obsequiously.

"I daresay you were not expecting me?" questioned the railroad magnate.

"Oh, yes," and the evil-eyed old man grinned cunningly. "It's about the Countess of Salisbury's garter. I have seen the afternoon newspapers."

In a room directly above them The Hawk was spread out luxuriously all over his bed,

engaged in the pleasing pastime of planning a rose-strewn future. On a table within easy reach still lay Daddy Heinz' revolver, cocked; and beside that glittering instrument of death was a neat stack of banknotes. Not much—heigho!—The Hawk yawned lazily—only a paltry thousand dollars, a trifle of loose pocket change. Beneath his pillow was a jewel case, and alongside that the Countess of Salisbury's garter, with one diamond gouged out. Here was a metamorphosis. Truly the lean days had gone. The Hawk could remember only dimly the time when he had been driven to filching pies from a kitchen window.

Planning a rose-strewn future! And not at all that future he had looked forward to gloatingly as he plodded along through the rain the night before—or had that been a thousand years ago? A greater future it was—a future into which the fluffy red head and the alluring voice of Helen Hamilton intruded with charming persistence. For The Hawk, too, had read the afternoon papers, devoured every line in every one of them with an eagerness pardonable, perhaps, in view of his intimate connection with the events recited there.

It pleased The Hawk to know that Her name was Helen Hamilton; it pleased him more to know that She was the daughter of Brokaw Hamilton, the railroad magnate—it pleased him and quickened his pulse. Light heartedly he had laughed, as all of New York had, at the vicissitudes which had befallen poor Skeets; and he was honestly glad to know that the poet was free at last and clear of the odd entanglements. The Hawk smiled when he learned that Detective Meredith was “moving heaven and earth” to solve the mysteries of that Arabian Night. Also, he was delighted with the information that the thing he had picked from the mantel in the vacant house was a lady’s garter. He had examined it with a new interest.

After awhile The Hawk drew the jewel case from beneath his pillow and meditatively spilled its contents out on the bed in front of him. Piece by piece he handled the quaintly wrought articles which reflected the capricious taste of their rightful owner. These rings, she had worn them on her fingers; these bracelets had clasped the round, soft wrists; this brooch had nestled in the delicious curve of her neck! And a single coin—a half dollar! She had given him that because

she had thought he was starving! Shamelessly The Hawk pressed it to his lips. Love is universal.

For an hour or more The Hawk lay flat on his back, staring with blind eyes into nothingness, and dreaming of Her Loveliness! It pleased him to recall that curious effulgence, that halo that had surrounded her as she leaned from her window and unwittingly placed her jewels in his keeping. He remembered every curve of the slender figure as she had stood on the station-house steps with her father and Meredith; the compassion in her face when he had asked for alms; and her eyes were blue, blue, blue! Suddenly The Hawk sat up straight in bed.

"Why not?" he demanded enigmatically of the bed-post; and "Why not?" he asked of the little table whereon the revolver lay; and "Why not?" he queried of the half dollar which she—She—had charmed with her touch; and "Why not?" he wanted to know of the blazing electric light which burned above him; and "Why not?" he inquired of the world at large through the open window.

He arose and went to the mirror, where he stood for a long time staring into the scrubby-

bearded face reflected there. The bland eyes were shallow no longer; some new quality had been born in them. In that brief instant The Hawk was above sordid things; love had exalted him—he almost had a soul. All at once he understood why Skeets, being in love with Helen, could write poetry. Why, hang it, he couldn't help but write poetry! He could have written poetry himself at that instant.

"Why not?" he asked anew of the scrubby-bearded reflection. And the answer came out of the void: "Daddy Heinz!" His face hardened; his eyes narrowed. To all intents and purposes The Hawk was dead to all men—to the world at large—to Meredith—to all save Daddy Heinz! He had made a mistake in arousing Daddy Heinz' sleeping memory of him; in coming here at all. If only he had stopped to think!

But Daddy Heinz knew him, and in that knowledge would lie his danger. He had deliberately placed himself in the old man's grip; and always he would be near, threatening, blackmailing, whining. If only some one would sink his fingers in that venerable throat! The Hawk's teeth were clenched; his own wiry hands worked nervously.

Violence had always been distasteful to The Hawk, but now Daddy Heinz was in the way; now it was necessary to—

“Except for Daddy Heinz there is no reason,” he told himself at last; he didn’t even pay Skeets the tribute of considering him at all. Again he studied his reflection in the mirror. “A barber could shape me up in half an hour. I want her—I’ll win her!” He smiled charmingly at his reflection. “It would doubtless please Brokaw Hamilton to know my decision.”

Shortly after midnight a patrolman in West Thirtieth Street noticed that the door of a disreputable looking old house was standing open, and he made an investigation. In one of the rooms on the ground floor he found old Daddy Heinz, dead! There were three bullet holes in his body, one shot having entered the head from the back. On the floor beside the evil old man lay a revolver in which there were three exploded shells. There was no sign of any one else in the house, except in the room directly over that where the body was found. The bed there had been slept in. A vast quantity of jewels and art treasures, long

stolen, were recovered; also a curious little leather-bound book. It seemed to be an account book of some sort.

While the police from the Tenderloin Station were investigating the mystery, Brokaw Hamilton, pallid as death, staggered up the steps of his home in The Bronx and let himself in with his latchkey. He went straight to his study and, after locking the door, placed a single unset diamond in a secret drawer of one of his curio cabinets. It was the stone The Hawk had gouged out of the Countess of Salisbury's garter!

A tiny fleck of blood on Brokaw Hamilton's hand! He stared at it, his eyes dilating with horror.

"Good God!" he exclaimed.

PART III

"I LOVE YOU!"

CHAPTER I

"HOW," queried the stranger in the Garden of Eden, "how do you and Eve manage to while away your time?"

"Well," Adam replied, as he thoughtfully ran his fingers through his chin whiskers, "sometimes we sit and think, and other times we just sit."

Treading warily to avoid stepping on the family snake, the stranger went forth into the unknown world bearing with him the original *bon mot*. It is next heard of as applied to the sprawly little village of Satuit, which cuddles in the majestic sweep of Massachusetts Bay, entrenched behind frowning battlements of graveled cliffs which rise sheerly from the spume of the sea. Like unto Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden its inhabitants manage to while away most of their time sitting and thinking, principally just sitting.

In the old days when bold, bad pirates in long, low, rakish craft threaded the coast

line, snooping in and out of the verdant coves, and smuggling was a recognized profession, Satuit's mirror-like harbor was a famous rendezvous and fitting-out point. Even now there are grizzled, leather-colored, doddering old chaps there who could tell marvelous tales of blood, and pillage, and piracy; of ravished galleons, and the sacking of rich seaports in the West Indies—could tell marvelous tales, and smack their lips in the telling. Even now there may be found in some ancient, cobwebbed cellar a wee drop of golden rum carefully hoarded through the misty years that separate progressive to-day from that past when the sunshiny liquor of Jamaica was fair loot on the high seas; even now an occasional quaint treasure of art which, perhaps, had place in a Spanish grandee's palace on the Caribbean may be found kicking around some curious old house of Satuit.

To-day, almost in the suburbs of a great city, Satuit is an anachronism, a part of a past century with the romantic glamour of that past hanging over it. Captain Kidd's treasure is hidden under every gaunt, gray stone; and Puritans, in spirit at least, still stalk the evanescent deer, blunderbuss at

shoulder; or shoot wild ducks from their front yards; or fish over their back fences, figuratively speaking, for luscious little smelt; or dig ditches, as necessity may be. There is even an occasional Indian, remnant of his race, stoical as ever, but grown heap much fat on the white man's grub. It was out of consideration for him that the first law on the old town book was abrogated. This law said that no game should be shot on the Sabbath, except wolves and Indians. To this extent Satuit has progressed.

A rifle shot away, generally southward, is the old oaken bucket—yes, the long-suffering bucket, the moss-covered bucket, the iron-bound bucket upon which musical youth has hung so many strange and weird inharmonies; and a rifle shot beyond that is the little white church to which, tradition says, Daniel Webster used to go; and another rifle shot away stands a finger-like marble shaft to the great Miles Standish who, it will be remembered, incautiously sent John Alden to do his wooing. Still farther on is Plymouth, and Plymouth Rock, the hearthstone of American liberty. It is very small for its age, is Plymouth Rock, of a size to have been laid by the original Plymouth hen—small for its age and far

from the water. Tradition says the Pilgrims landed on this particular rock, and if we believe that thing about Daniel Webster going to church, we might as well believe this along with it.

Off in the other direction, generally northward, on a sandy spit which thrusts its curve into the bay, is the identical lighthouse, fallen into ruin, behind which Abigail and Rebecca Bates hid in the twilight and sounded the call to arms, thus shooing off the British invaders in the war of 1812. Yes, it's the same lighthouse you've read about in history. Even now, on stormy nights, white-clad, spooky, girlish figures move about the ruins, and the piping of a flute and the shrilling of a drum are heard high above the whistle of the wind and the lashing of the sea. On and on beyond is Black Rock, and Merrymount. Some historically important things happened at these places, but they escape me at the moment. And on still farther is the city of Quincy, home of the dead presidents.

In the midst of all this nestles the village of Satuit, scattering, and long and lanky of street, quiet, restful, and untouched of the world—an oasis of the past in the desert of

the present. Echoes of the bustling world outside reach but faintly—a motor car that blunders in and goes screaming through, an occasional aëroplane that comes slithering out of the aviation field at Squantum; a fat real-estate man who would chop up the village into town lots and build monstrous houses upon them; an occasional touch of the vernacular of the day in the mouths of its inhabitants. Then, too, beyond Peggotty Beach, across Bass' Cove, a wireless mast rises from Brant Rock, an exclamation point in the magical story of man's achievement.

Sentinel over all, towers the minaret of Minot's Ledge lighthouse—a spindle against the glow of the aurora borealis. I see its flash from my window now as I write. One-four-three is the signal; sailor men call it the "I-love-you" light. "I love you!" it flashes over the threshing waters to the incoming liner; "I love you!" it tells my true love in her bedchamber; "I love you!" it blazes to the fisher lad scudding into the sunset; "I love you!" it assures the doubting maid. So it stands, a beacon, a personal message out of the void of night. It is right and fit that it should be so.

And now the stage is set; on with the play!

CHAPTER II

IT had never been given to Cap'n Barry to fathom the vagaries of city folk. Just why a girl, clad only in a bathing suit that revealed an astonishing length of silken hosiery—only in a bathing suit, and a sensuous glory of brick-red hair that rippled down over her shoulders, half hiding the foam-white throat and arms, should sit for two mortal hours gazing out upon the incoming tide in Bass' Cove with dreamy eyes which reflected the sapphire of the sea—just why she should sit there doing that and nothing but that, was past his comprehension. And an east wind blowing, too! Be dinged if he could see, anyhow, why anybody'd want'er splash around in water that warn't much warmer'n the inside of an ice-cream freezer—be dinged if *he* could see it!

Upon the white expanse of Peggotty Beach the girl's was the only figure. From his sunny nook in the lee of a moss shanty the Cap'n had occasionally craned his neck around to squint at her over the shimmering sands. 'Twarn't that he were curious, as you might say, but he'd been noticing her

for several days, and she was a stranger, and it irritated him to know there was somebody in Satuit he warn't acquainted with. For he knew everything about everybody, did the Cap'n. He had a subtle way, all his own, of acquiring information.

He pondered the situation with increasing annoyance, until finally he could stand it no longer. He arose, shook out his pipe, and went over to the girl.

"Morning!" he greeted.

Stirred out of her dreaminess, she glanced up at him quickly. The slight movement set the sunlight to playing strange pranks in the brick-red hair; the sapphire eyes took in the aged, weather-beaten figure and the wrinkled, leather-like countenance at one sweep. She nodded, and smiled brightly.

"Good morning!" she replied.

"Ain't you cold?" The Cap'n appraised her scant costume uneasily.

"Cold?" She laughed, and the silken limbs vanished sedately beneath her bathing skirt. "On a day like this? Why, it's glorious! I've been sitting here perfectly fascinated by the play of color on the rocks over there. Those big ones look like twin lions, don't they? And did you ever see

so many shades of reds, and blues, and purples?"

Instantly the Cap'n indexed her and filed her away; she was one o' them artists. They all talked like that. He'd met 'em before—had even argued with 'em as to the color of them same rocks. He disdained to go into the matter again.

"One o' the new people, ain't you?" he began tactfully, as he leaned back against a near-by dory.

"New people?" the girl repeated. "Oh, yes, yes. We've been here only a week. This is our first summer."

She braced herself on her outstretched arms, looking up into his face with a quizzical expression about her lips and a demure light in the depths of her blue, blue eyes. Instinctively the Cap'n recognized that here was opportunity for the display of all his mental adroitness, his diplomatic deftness.

"What might your name be?" he asked, subtly.

"My name?" she repeated. "My name is Quain."

"Quain?"

"Quain, yes—Cicely Quain." She smiled. "Do you like it? I adore Cicely."

"Then you're one o' the folks that's moved into that writer feller's place on Second Cliff?"

"Stepping Stones, yes."

"Knowed when he built it he'd never be able to keep it up. That gray-haired old woman up there is your ma, mebbe?"

"The middle-aged lady with white hair is my mother, yes."

"And that feller with all the yeller whiskers and hair—he's your husband, mebbe?"

There was a deepening of the sun flush in the girl's cheeks; her nose crinkled, and she laughed outright. She shook her head until the brick red of her hair seemed to leap into a living flame.

"No," she said; "I'm not married."

"Brother, mebbe?"

"No."

"Just aboarding with you?"

"No; he's our guest."

The Cap'n had a subtle way, all his own, of acquiring information. He showed it by his next question.

"What might *his* name be?"

"His name is von Derp."

"Von—which?"

"Von Derp—Mr. August von Derp. He's from Holland."

"Dutchman, huh! I don't think much o' Dutchmen. Used to be a Dutch cook on a ship with me. They can't cook much." He stroked his straggly beard. "Where is your pa? Dead?"

The abruptness of the question startled the girl into another laugh. The Cap'n looked down upon her curiously, vaguely astonished. Dusky gold shadows were racing through her hair; the sapphire in her eyes changed to turquoise.

"No. My father's in New York."

"Banker, mebbe?"

"No; railroad man."

"Oh. I knowed a railroad man once. He was a brakeman on the New Haven. Reckon, mebbe, you wouldn't have knowed him?"

"Possibly not."

"What sort o' job has your pa got? Conductor, mebbe?"

There was a quick crunching of gravel behind them, and they both turned. Coming toward them across the beach was a young man, immaculate of attire, long of hair, with a strange eagerness in his dreamy eyes. The girl rose to her knees, and stared in astonishment.

"Skeets!" she exclaimed.

"Helen!"

"Well, of all people on earth!" Suddenly she laughed, came to her feet, and sped down the slant of the beach toward the water.

"Helen!" There was a world of disappointment in Skeets' tone.

The girl paused at the brink of the water to wave one hand mockingly, then, turning, plunged into the heart of a billow. It was a full minute before she reappeared, far out beyond the roll of the surf, her hair streaming behind her like little brick-red serpents as she swam steadily out into the open cove with slow, powerful stroke. The two men stood watching her in dumb amazement—the old man and the young man.

"I'll be dinged!" said the Cap'n.

"Dammit!" growled Skeets.

Their eyes met.

"What made her do that?"

"Because—because she's a woman."

"You called her Helen, didn't you?"

"Well?"

"She was just atelling me her name was Cicely."

Came a sudden blaze into the dreamy eyes

of the poet. He took off his hat and brushed back a long forelock with one pale, lavender glove.

"She was just atelling me her name—" the Cap'n insisted.

"Say, do you see that big rock way over there?" Skeets demanded, and he pointed off toward Third Cliff. "Well, here's a cigar. You go over and sit on that rock, and smoke that cigar. When I need you, I'll call you."

The Cap'n took the cigar mechanically and stared at it perplexed. What was this young feller adriving at? Mebbe he didn't want him around! Well, by gravy, he could take a hint if anybody could; and besides it looked like a good cigar, so he took it thriftily and went, deeply aggrieved. Be dinged if *he* could understand city folks anyhow—be *dinged* if he could!

Left alone, Skeets took up a moody vigil on the beach, waiting angrily until such time as it should please Helen—there, I've let it out! I beg your pardon, really!—until such time as it should please Cicely to come in. Now she was visible as a wave lifted her to its top; then she would vanish behind a sinuous crest of the waters, and his heart

would stand still until she reappeared. After a long, long time she began swimming inshore again; finally she was within hailing distance.

"Helen!" he called pleadingly.

"My name is not Helen," she replied.

"Cicely!"

"Miss Quain, if you please."

"Miss Quain, then. Please come in."

"I'm not coming in until you go away."

"And I'm not going away until you come in."

Skeets sat down grimly.

"Very well; I shall not come in at all. I'll remain out here in this cold water until I take cramps and drown." She turned and paddled toward the open.

"Helen!" She swam on. "Cicely!" She swam on. "Miss Quain!" She looked back. "I have something I must say to you."

"I don't want to hear it."

"I won't go until you do hear it."

"Very well; I'll drown."

She swam on steadily. Skeets took off his perfectly good hat and slammed it down upon the beach violently, then picked it up, shook the sand out of it, and jammed it back on his head. Perched on a distant rock, like a crow on a limb, old Cap'n Barry cackled

dryly. Be dinged if *he* could understand 'em!

Skeets started away angrily.

"I'm going!" he flung over his shoulder.

"Oh, don't rush away on my account," Cicely taunted. "I'd just as soon drown."

Skeets knew the indomitable will beneath that glory of red hair, and dumb with anger at the unreasonableness of her attitude, he swung along the short curving road that led from Peggotty Beach to Stepping Stones. He'd explain that affair of the garter to Helen if—if—hang it, if he had to stick around all summer! She had whisked away from New York before he'd had a chance to even see her; and now he'd—he'd *make* her listen!

Stepping Stones was a rather more pretentious place than its neighbors—a very modern cottage, with a very old well-sweep on one side and a very new Italian garden on the other—incongruous to a degree. In one corner of the sloping lawn an embowered, bevined study building nestled. Thrown across the lawn in crescent shape were the huge boulders which gave the place its name.

Skeets was possessed of only one idea in the wide world—to see and talk to Helen's

mother. He was convinced that his tale of woe would soften her adamant heart; and things might be possible. So intent was he upon this one object that he almost ran into a young man who was sauntering down the drive as he turned in. Involuntarily he paused, and for an instant the eyes of the two men met.

There was something striking in the stranger's appearance, in his manner, in his dress—a distinct foreign look about him, Skeets decided. His hair was rather long, wavy, and of a pale blond cast—almost lemon colored; his beard, exquisitely trimmed and pointed, was of the same color, but if anything a shadow darker; his brows, delicate as pencil lines and pale as his hair, were lifted inquiringly now, opening wide a pair of—of brown eyes? Yes, hang it, they *were* brown! There was a mathematical courtesy in his manner, and indefinable savor of European boulevards in the trivial niceties of his dress.

"I beg your pardon," Skeets stammered. "Does Mrs. Hamilton live here?"

"Mrs. Quain lives here," replied the stranger. He raised his hat. There was no accent in his speech, but the precise little

twist of a man who speaks perfectly some language other than his own.

"Stupid of me," Skeets apologized. "I mean Mrs. Quain. Thank you."

The stranger nodded, lifted his hat again, and strolled off down the road toward Peggotty Beach. There was a little of perplexity in his eyes; and something more than that—a subtle, sardonic amusement. Skeets stood looking after him until he vanished at the turn in the road. Not once did the stranger look back.

Mrs. Hamilton—really, I beg your pardon!—Mrs. Quain, beautiful in her maturity with the complexion of an apple-cheeked girl and snow-white hair, received Skeets with a little surprised air that was almost a welcome.

"Well!" she greeted him. "How came you here?"

"I don't know," Skeets replied gloomily. "That is, of course, I'm here because Helen—I mean Cicely, you know—she is here, but—"

His voice died away of its own accord; the poetic eyes reflected a settled melancholy. Perchance there came to him a haunting thought of that yellow-topped exquisite whom he had passed in the drive.

"But how did you learn where we were?" Mrs. Quain insisted. "How did you find us?"

"It was rather curious, since I come to think of it," was the reply. "Some one called me on the telephone yesterday afternoon in New York and told me you and your daughter were here under the name of Quain, and—and I came. I don't know who it was at the 'phone; I had been so anxious to find you that I—I forgot to ask."

"Curious," Mrs. Quain commented languidly. "The only person in New York who knew our whereabouts is my husband, and he wouldn't have—"

"I can readily believe that," Skeets agreed grimly. He poked a pale lavender finger into the crown of his hat and spun it dreamily. "He doesn't like me."

"And yet—you called here?" Mrs. Quain reminded him.

"Yes, I called because Helen—that is, Cicely—oh, you know!"

And before Skeets realized just what he was doing he unbosomed himself to the mother of this girl he loved. She listened in silence to the end, without astonishment, without approval, with a slight smile on her

lips, and a far-away look in her eyes—listening to all of it, hopes, plans, elopement, everything. At length Skeets stopped talking because there was nothing else to say.

"I have very curious ideas about love and marriage, Mr. Gaunt," she remarked. "I believe a girl should marry the man she loves. Isn't that old-fashioned?"

"Then?" and a great light of hope illumined the poet's face.

"I didn't know of the attempted elopement, but if I had known I doubt if I should have interfered, because—well, I'm old-fashioned, I suppose. And I knew she—Helen—Cicely—"

"Knew she loved me?" Skeets interrupted.

Mrs. Quain shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"However, my husband has ideas of his own," she continued. "I should never actively oppose his wishes. He objects to you; it is not my place to question why. You should not have come here."

"But—but—" Skeets stammered, "you—after what you've said, you're not going to send me away?"

"I couldn't send you away if I would—that is, away from the village," she pointed out. "I don't know that I should even have

the courage to forbid you the house, although perhaps I should."

"And besides," Skeets rushed on, "you and your daughter are here alone. You'll need some man about to—er—to—" What the deuce did women ever need men about for?

"We have one man about now," Mrs. Quain told him. "A Mr. von Derp. As I understand it, he is to remain with us all summer."

"Von Derp!" Skeets' thoughts instantly reverted to the yellow-topped stranger. "You mean the young man I met in the driveway?"

"Probably you met him. He went out just before you came in."

"Who is he, anyhow?" Skeets demanded.

"I don't know, I'm sure," Mrs. Quain replied, "except that he's from Holland—Amsterdam, I think—and is the son of a business associate of my husband's there. I don't know why," she added resignedly, "he should have been unloaded on us in this little place to entertain all summer. Why, we haven't even a fourth hand at bridge."

From the screened veranda where they sat they saw Cicely and von Derp turn into

the driveway—the girl in her dripping bathing suit and he, immaculate, leaning slightly toward her and talking earnestly.

Involuntarily Skeets' nervous fingers closed. Mrs. Quain noted the movement, slight as it was.

"I think, perhaps, he affects me that way, too," she said. "I can't get over the impression that he could fall violently in love with any woman who was rich enough."

Looking up quickly, as if at the suggestion of von Derp, Cicely saw Skeets, looked startled, then darted in a side entrance which led to her room. Von Derp came in the front way, and through to where his hostess and Skeets sat.

"Mr. Gaunt, a New York friend—Mr. von Derp of Holland."

"Charmed, I'm sure," von Derp, smiling, revealed firm white teeth. "If I'm not mistaken, Mr. Gaunt, I saw a likeness of you in a New York newspaper a few days since?"

"Perhaps," Skeets assented, with something vaguely antagonistic in his manner. "It was on the occasion of my arrest charged with the theft of a jeweled garter and of a certain Miss Hamilton's jewels."

"I congratulate you upon your—what

shall I say?" said von Derp. "It was a ridiculous affair altogether. I must apologize for staring when I met you in the drive. It was then that I had my first impression of having seen you before."

Mrs. Quain sent a telegram to her husband:

"Keats Gaunt has found us here. Refuses to be sent away. What shall we do?"

To which her husband replied:

"I sent him there. Make him your guest while he remains. Give him every opportunity of being with Cicely. Match between them is absolutely necessary."

Mrs. Quain opened her beautiful eyes in astonishment.

"Well, anyway," she observed placidly, "he'll make a fourth hand at bridge."

CHAPTER III

WITH Chatham light hard down astern, and Race Point light aport, the motor boat *Pyramid* swung in a wide semicircle, and pointed her slender nose almost due west, questioning the darkness with a tentacle of flame from her powerful searchlamp. She slackened on the turn, and then, straightened out, her engines roared as her throttle was opened, and with quickened speed she went smashing on through the sinister green waters, the phosphorescent ruffle at her bow gleaming like white teeth, and trailing away into nothingness in her wake.

Through the gaunt rigging of fishing craft huddled like sheep at anchor were small, twinkling, detached stars; and this was Provincetown by night. More than once the man at the *Pyramid's* helm, himself an impalpable part of the surrounding gloom, glanced toward the town which hangs on the tail of Cape Cod; and a dozen times he turned flatly to stare astern. Twice he extended a hand and touched the throttle as if to slow his engine, but each time changed his mind.

Came at last, far behind, that which he

had evidently been expecting—a sudden bursting into view of another searchlight, low on the waters. Obviously, from the dip of the light, here too was a motor boat; and obviously, too, here was some new game of hare and hound. The *Pyramid* played it her own way, for her engines slowed suddenly, her helm went hard aport, and she swung in around Race Point like a curving arrow, the pursuing light dropping off astern. True to this course she held until the light reappeared; until her own light showed dead ahead a swarm of small craft bobbing at anchor in Provincetown haven.

Danger to his own craft, or those about him, was apparently of little moment to the helmsman of the *Pyramid*. Bearing straight down upon the half hundred or more sailboats and small vessels of the swarm, he pressed three buttons one after the other and his lights died—the searchlight first, then the red port, and the green starboard. Still there was a faint glow from the cabin; he touched a fourth button and that, too, was extinguished. From a distance the effect was if the *Pyramid* had dropped anchor and made snug for the night—obviously an effect calculated to throw the hound off the track.

But the *Pyramid* didn't slow. Like some black leviathan of the deep she went plunging on through utter darkness, her helmsman staring ahead tensely with only the night lights of other craft to guide him. Through the outer edge of the patch of vessels she wriggled on, rubbing shoulders with a dory here, and a catboat there, and a launch yonder—on and on through until came clear water ahead.

Then and not until then did the helmsman glance back. Already the powerful light of the pursuing motor boat had touched the outer fringe of the little fleet, and she was slowing. Abruptly the *Pyramid* came around to her helm on the starboard tack, straightened out, her engines crackled, and she leaped ahead like a thing of life. The hare had doubled; the hound seemed hopelessly entangled in the mess of small craft. Observing all of which, the helmsman of the *Pyramid* smiled, grimly.

"I think perhaps that will keep that chap busy for an hour or so," he remarked.

All her own lights extinguished, an excess of caution perhaps now, the *Pyramid* ran on blindly through the darkness with only the polar star to guide her. Mile after mile

she laid behind her, her nose pointing nor'-west-by-west, her helmsman staring ahead and smoking idly. In fifteen minutes he should pick up Minot's Ledge light; then it would be easy to make either Satuit harbor, or Bass' Cove, which his chart told him lay between Second and Third Cliffs. There he could lie up for the night, fill his gasoline tank, and be away early with a fair chance.

"I love you!"

The flashes of Minot's Ledge light—one-four-three—came at last faintly, low over the rolling waters. The helmsman nodded understandingly. Ten minutes later a glowing speck on Third Cliff reached him; another ten minutes and similar glowing specks appeared on Second Cliff. Within less than an hour the cliffs themselves bulked on either side of him, and running close up to the beach he cast anchor. It would be only a question of a few hours before the pursuing motor boat realized the trick that had been played; but it would probably have to beat up the coast to find him, and meanwhile there was a good night's rest ahead.

The clock on the little white church in Satuit was booming eleven as the helmsman, having made all snug for the night, went

below. With one hand he fumbled for an instant in the darkness of the cabin, then the electric lights flamed and he stood blinking in their glare, slender, almost boyish in figure, lithe, powerful, sinewy—built like a steel bridge. His face was youthful, his hair thick and wavy, his eyes brown.

"I'll take one look at this thing, anyway, before I turn in," he remarked.

From a drawer of the gravity table he produced a photograph and, dropping down on a stool beside the table, he fell to studying it. It seemed to be a representation of a personal ornament of some sort—a dark ribbon, edged with a contrasting color and overlaid with shields of gold upon each of which appeared to be a motto. "*Honi soit qui mal y pense!*" He spelled it out laboriously with the aid of a magnifying glass. In each of the shields a stone of some sort was set—it was impossible to tell what kind they were from the picture; and there was a pendant representing St. George and the Dragon.

"I don't think there's the slightest doubt but what it is the same," he mused. "If it is!"

He produced a long pocketbook from an inside pocket of his coat, and drew from it a

tissue-wrapped something which he opened. It was the Countess of Salisbury's garter! For half an hour he sat motionless, comparing the photograph, detail by detail, with the jeweled trifle which he had spread on the table before him. At length he rose, replaced the photograph in the drawer of the table, restored the garter to his pocket, and stepped out on deck for a final look around. Five minutes later he was sound asleep.

The clock on the little white church in the village struck twelve, then one, then two. A bulging searchlight swept around the point of Brant Rock, headed for Bass' Cove. On and on it came steadily, until finally the rhythmical beat of an engine was audible over the waters. Ten minutes, and the searchlight focused the *Pyramid* as she lay slowly rising and falling at anchor. Another ten minutes, and came a hail:

"Motor boat, ahoy!"

The man asleep in the cabin of the *Pyramid* moved uneasily.

"Hey, there, aboard the *Pyramid*!"

The sleeping man awoke suddenly, listening; instinctively he reached for the electric switch, but he didn't turn it—he merely waited.

"Hey, you *Pyramid*!"

Through the portholes of the *Pyramid* the glare of the searchlight poured in thin streams. For a scant second the face of the man in her cabin was illumined. Dead white it was, the colorless lips closed, the eyes narrowed, the chin thrust forward. Silently as a snake he slid out of his berth, pulled open the drawer of a locker, and took up a revolver. It was loaded, he knew that—it was always loaded! Facing the sliding door which led to the deck, he stepped back until he rested against the forward wall of the cabin, and there he crouched, the revolver in his right hand, his left resting on the electric switch.

"If it's a bomb, they've got me!" he muttered. "Otherwise, I have a chance!"

The engine of the other motor boat was still now. Came a squeak of davits as her tender was lowered; then the splash of oars, and finally the *Pyramid* rocked slightly as the tender bumped gently on her port. Still the man in the cabin was motionless!

There was the muffled sound of feet on the deck as one, two men scrambled over the rail; then the hissing of their boots across the canvas floorcloth, the laying of a hand on the door of the cabin, and it slid back.

For a scant instant the clear sky was visible beyond, then was obscured by a moving figure.

Came a sudden blaze of light as the electric switch was turned, then a curt:

"Hands up!"

The man in the door was no fool. The light, sudden as it was unexpected, dazzled him so that he could barely distinguish the crouching pajama-clad figure at the far end of the cabin with revolver lined for his breast—so his hands went up.

As he stared at the intruder the face of the man with the revolver underwent a curious change. The color came back to his cheeks, the brown eyes opened slightly, the lips parted.

"Why," and there was a note of astonishment in his voice, "it's Detective Meredith, isn't it?"

"Right," was the response.

"I beg your pardon, really," and the threatening revolver clattered on the table. "You startled me a bit. Come in."

"Thank you!" There was grim irony in the detective's voice. "You don't object to a friend, I hope? Allow me, Mr. Dexter," and he stood aside to admit an English-

looking person with gimlet-like eyes, "to introduce Mr. George Harrington Leigh, alias The Hawk. Mr. Dexter," he took the trouble to explain courteously, "is from Scotland Yard."

"Scotland Yard? Indeed?" There was almost a welcome in the manner of the pajama-clad young man. "I've met some of the Scotland Yard operators. However," and he smiled pleasantly, "Mr. Meredith is in error as to my name. I'm afraid he mistakes me for some one else?"

"Yes?" There was an ironic courtesy in Meredith's tone. "And what name does it please you to wear now?"

"It pleases me to be known as Bruce Colquhoun, if it's all the same to you?"

"Just as you like, of course." Meredith stared at him for a moment, then, laughing, picked up the revolver from the table. "It has taken me six years to land you. It was a long chase, eh?"

CHAPTER IV

WITH many and divers creature comforts generously provided from the well-stocked galley of the *Pyramid* spread out on the table between them, the three men sat down in apparent amity to thresh out the matter in hand. It may have been accident, but it probably wasn't, that caused Detectives Meredith and Dexter to choose those seats nearest the companionway which led to the deck, for by their choice they effectually barred all egress to their pajama-clad host—this self-styled Bruce Colquhoun.

There was complacent gratification in Meredith's manner as he drained his glass and leaned back, tilting his cigar upward; sheer, watchful rigidity in the attitude of the Scotland Yard man, Dexter, whose eyes, never for a moment, left those of their host; and Colquhoun himself seemed merely curious. Certainly there was no other visible emotion, not a trace of anxiety, or uneasiness, or even of impatience.

"You know, Leigh," Meredith began finally.

"Colquhoun, please."

"You know, Colquhoun," Meredith corrected himself, "there was a widespread and well-established belief that you were dead until the other night when old Daddy Heinz was found murdered in his place in West Thirtieth Street. I don't think I am incorrect when I say that the search for The Hawk was at an end. But certain discoveries were made in the examination of Daddy Heinz' place which—"

"Before you go on," Colquhoun interrupted, "let me ask who Daddy Heinz is—or was?"

"So you're going to make trouble, after all?" the detective questioned. He shook his head in obvious disappointment. "Does it happen, by any chance, that you've ever seen this?"

He produced a badly worn, curious little leather-bound book and, without opening it or relinquishing it, held it up before the eyes of the young man. At last Colquhoun signified a casual negative.

"I have no recollection whatever of ever having seen it."

"Well, I'll tell you what it is!" Meredith leaned forward suddenly and brought a great fist down on the table. "It's old

Daddy Heinz' account book—absolute proof that The Hawk was alive on June 17, eight days ago! The last entry, made the day Daddy Heinz was murdered, reads: 'Advanced to Hawk, \$1,000!' " He paused.

"Well?" queried Colquhoun. "What about it?"

"On the strength of that entry search for The Hawk was renewed," and Meredith flung a hand impatiently at his host. "I put practically every plain-clothes man in New York on the job. Three days ago one of them discovered that a man answering the description of The Hawk, except in one minor particular, had purchased a large, powerful motor boat—the *Lizzie Ann*—and had vanished in it up Long Island Sound. We chartered another motor boat and started in pursuit, Dexter and I, with a pilot. We picked up the first trace of the *Lizzie Ann* at New London, where," he spoke measuredly, impressively, "where we learned that the old name had been painted out and a new one—the *Pyramid*—painted on!"

Colquhoun smiled charmingly.

"Just between us now, man to man," he asked, "if you had bought a good looking

motor boat named the *Lizzie Ann* wouldn't you have changed the name of it?"

The frivolous tone irritated Meredith, and brought a flush to his cheeks. That complacent gratification, born of the belief that quarry long sought had surrendered without a fight, vanished.

"We were not more than three hours behind you into Martha's Vineyard, and only two hours at Siasconset, where you stopped to take gasoline," he went on in detail. "We sighted you off Chatham light, and followed you around Race Point, where we lost you. I had an impression you'd make for Boston, so we swept up the coast until—well, here we are."

"And now that you are here," remarked Colquhoun quietly as he flicked the ashes from his cigarette, "just what do you want?"

"We want you!"

"The charge against me being—?"

"There are several," the detective declared harshly. "First, complicity in the murder of Daddy Heinz; second, complicity in the theft of the Brokaw Hamilton jewels, which was distinctly in the manner of The Hawk; again, a possible connection with the disappearance of a certain jeweled garter. Going

back some six or seven years, we want you for the Miller jewel robberies aggregating a hundred thousand dollars; and the Kendrick affair, and the disappearance of the—”

“That’s quite enough,” the young man interrupted. “I gather from all you’ve said that this person whom you call The Hawk is really wanted. And you say I am The Hawk?”

“I intended to convey some such impression,” remarked Meredith, curtly. “You’re not going to deny it, are you?”

“Well, before you take me, before you so much as lay a finger on me, be sure I *am* The Hawk!” Some curious change had come into Colquhoun’s manner. “And one other little thing. You have a warrant, of course?”

“Yes.”

“Issued in the state of New York?”

“Right.”

“Well, don’t get excited and forget that I am now in the state of Massachusetts, and if it comes to a showdown your warrant is worthless here.” He paused to light a fresh cigarette. “I have no intention of being disagreeable, but— Sit down again, and let’s talk it all over. There’s no hurry.”

Detective Meredith obeyed the command

automatically. Vaguely he felt somehow that he was losing ground; and once he glanced uneasily at Dexter. Imperturbable as ever, the Scotland Yard man was merely staring straight into Colquhoun's eyes.

"Now," and Colquhoun became the inquisitor, "do you know personally this individual whom you call The Hawk?"

"I do, yes."

"You know him well, I suppose?"

"I've seen him twice." Meredith failed to exhibit any enthusiasm as he answered.

"Only twice! And how long ago was that? Some six years, I imagine?"

"Six years, yes; but—"

"Just a moment, please. You have a photograph of him?"

"There's not a photograph of him in the world, so far as any one knows."

"But you have, of course, a minute description of him?"

Meredith nodded emphatically, but it was Dexter who produced the printed slip which, half a dozen years previously, had been sent broadcast over the world. Colquhoun shifted his gaze to the Scotland Yard man.

"Would you mind reading it?" he inquired.

"Brown, wavy hair," said Dexter.

"Right!" said Colquhoun.

"Brown eyes."

"Yes."

"Clear olive complexion."

"Yes."

"Straight nose."

"Yes."

"Medium mouth, with rather full lips."

"Correct." This from Meredith.

"Perfect teeth."

Colquhoun answered in the affirmative by smiling again.

"Number 8 shoe."

Detective Meredith picked up one of a pair beside the berth and examined it.

"Seven and a half," he said.

"Number 7 hat."

Opening a locker beside him, Colquhoun took out a stiff hat and passed it to Meredith.

"Seven and an eighth," he read.

"Seven glove." Dexter was reading monotonously, raising his eyes each time to meet those of Colquhoun.

"Correct," Colquhoun admitted.

"Carriage straight."

"Right." This, too, from Colquhoun.

"About five feet ten inches tall."

"Five feet ten and a quarter," Colquhoun corrected.

"Weight about—" For the first time there was a change in Dexter's expression, and he raised his eyes to Colquhoun.

"I said the description was perfect except in one minor detail," Meredith reminded them. "This thing of weight is the exception."

Colquhoun nodded and arose.

"The description says," Dexter told them, "that his weight was about one hundred and eighty pounds."

"I weigh just one hundred and forty-seven," said Colquhoun.

"That's of no consequence," Meredith asserted. "Any man may lose weight."

For half a minute, perhaps, the young man stood motionless and silent, staring at the two detectives. Dexter mechanically folded the printed slip and tucked it away; Meredith's eyes were blazing.

"That's all of it?" Colquhoun demanded.

"Except that I've seen you twice," Meredith pointed out; "except for the manner of your disappearance from New York; except for the fact that you changed the name of your boat—and in addition there are a

hundred other trivial things, one of them being the fact that you knew me and called me by name when I entered this cabin."

"I have seen your picture in half a dozen newspapers within the week in connection with the Brokaw Hamilton jewel case," Colquhoun told him, quietly. "Is it so very curious, after all, that I should know you?"

"Why did you run away from us, then?"

"That is for you to find out." Suddenly Colquhoun leaned across the table, resting on his hands, his face not more than two feet from Meredith's. "You want The Hawk," he taunted. "You've never seen him but twice, and that was six years ago. Now, *am I the man you want? Have you ever seen me before in your life? Isn't it true that the description you have there would fit two out of every five young men you meet? You want The Hawk; you say you know him. Do you want me? Am I the man?*"

Dexter glanced from the tense face of the young man to the puzzled countenance of his fellow detective. Meredith leaned to one side, struck a match, and relighted his cigar.

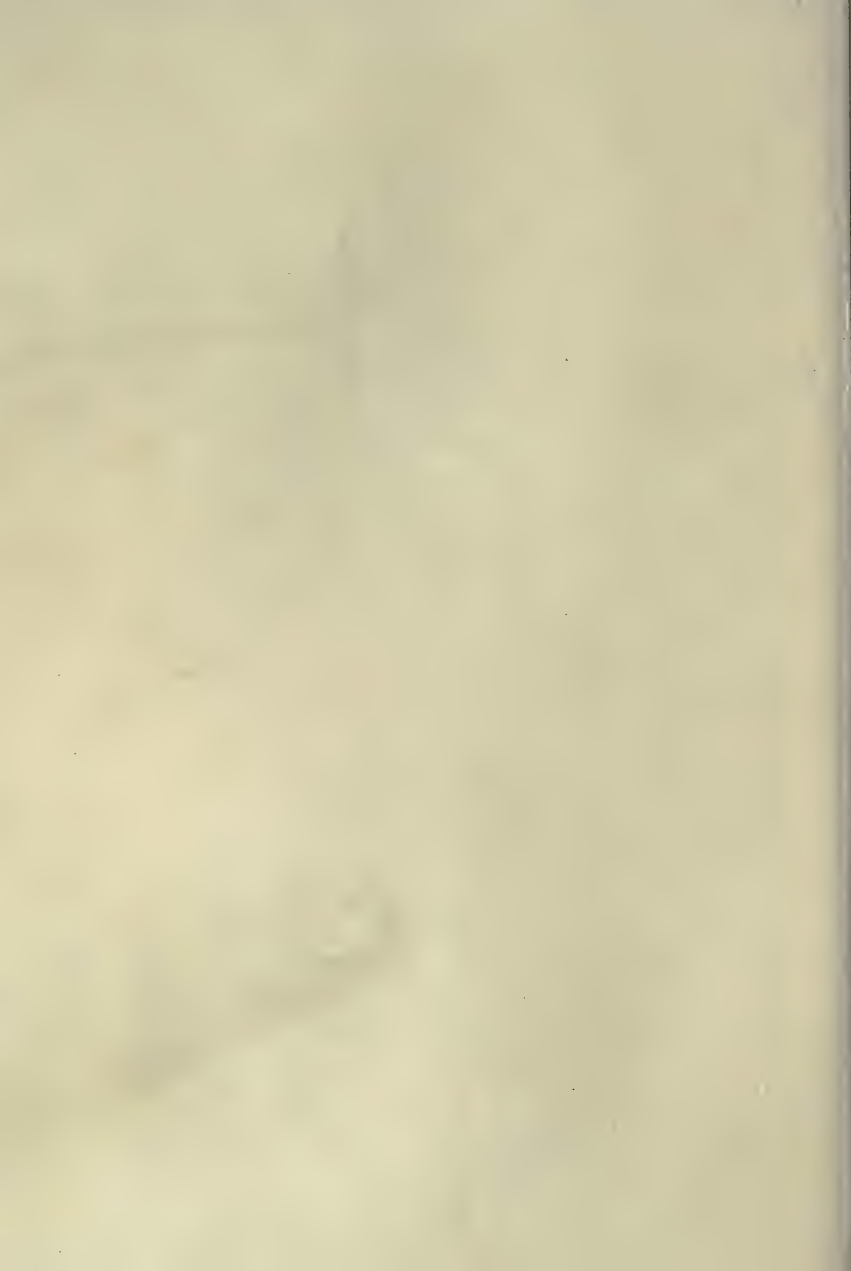
"Your description is purely superficial," Colquhoun declared in the same tone. "Do



"Now!" Said Colquhoun, "Do you want me? Am I the man?"

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My Lady's Garter



you recognize my voice as The Hawk's? Have you a record of the finger prints of The Hawk? Or a rogue's gallery picture? Are there any distinguishing marks on his body? For instance, I am vaccinated on my right arm. Was The Hawk vaccinated on his right or left? The left is usual. Have you any—"

"Why did you change the name of your boat?"

"Because I didn't like the other one."

"And if you are *not* The Hawk, who are you?"

"Bruce Colquhoun is my name."

"But who are you? Where do you come from? What do you do? Why are you here?"

"Those are things for you to find out."

"You refuse to give any account of yourself at all?"

"I do."

There was a long, tense silence. Meredith was possibly the ablest man in the New York police department; and there were only rare occasions when he was in doubt. But now—now! He glanced around rather helplessly at Dexter; the gimlet-like eyes told him nothing.

"You know, of course," Colquhoun continued suddenly, "that your New York warrant is worthless here in Massachusetts. Very well. If you really want me I'll waive my rights, surrender to you, and go back to New York with you now. If you want to search, I'll deliver over to you now keys to every drawer, every locker, every cupboard aboard this boat, and I'll empty my pockets on the table in front of you. But," and there was almost a menace in his voice, "if you fail to prove I *am* The Hawk I shall hold you responsible to the last fraction, legally and morally; and in addition to all that I'll make you the laughing stock of the police of the world. *Do you want me?*"

Meredith only stared. Colquhoun turned away suddenly, drew a bunch of keys from his trousers, and they rattled on the table under Meredith's hands. Again he turned, this time to draw a long pocketbook from his coat. That, too, he tossed on the table. Meredith picked it up eagerly.

"One moment before you open that," the young man interrupted. "You can't identify me as The Hawk, and you know it perfectly. There are papers in that pocketbook that *will* identify me as some one other

than The Hawk, but if you open it to find I am not The Hawk I've told you what will happen. The same conditions apply to the keys. And your warrant was issued in New York!"

He turned away suddenly and stood looking idly through a porthole into the night. Meredith and Dexter exchanged one quick glance, and Dexter shook his head almost imperceptibly. After a moment Meredith replaced the pocketbook on the table, gingerly. So, it happened that for an instant he had held the Countess of Salisbury's garter in his hand! Rising, he pushed the keys back toward Colquhoun. Dexter, too, arose; the young man turned.

"I'm beginning to believe there *has* been some bally mistake, you know!" remarked the Scotland Yard man.

"And you?" The young man shot the question at Meredith, curtly.

"We all make mistakes sometimes," the detective admitted. He was staring straight into Colquhoun's eyes. "There's one more question I'd like—"

"Ask it if you like. I don't know that I'll answer it."

"You were crouching against the wall

there prepared to kill when we entered the cabin," Meredith reminded him. "If you were not expecting us whom were you expecting?"

"I'll not answer the question," was the crisp reply. "I'll merely point out that if I had been The Hawk I *would* have killed you, wouldn't I?"

Meredith didn't say.

"That's all, I think," Bruce went on after a pause. "You decline to arrest me? Very well. I'll accept your apologies for the intrusion, and—good night. I'm dead for sleep."

Meredith and Dexter scrambled over the side of the *Pyramid* into their tender and rowed away. Colquhoun stared after them until they were swallowed up in the darkness, then went below. The pocketbook containing the Countess of Salisbury's garter still lay on the table.

"Gad, if he *had* opened it!" He laughed charmingly.

CHAPTER V

OLD Cap'n Barry pulled sturdily, at times almost vainly, against an ebbing tide which slid past his oars silently and smoothly as oil, grounded his dory, and with thin sinewy shanks bare to the knees, hopped out upon Peggotty Beach. Cicely Quain, curled upon the sands in bathing dress, watched him idly as he dexterously ran the light boat up the slant beyond reach of the lapping waters, and her eyes followed his as he turned around and stared out upon the heaving bosom of Bass' Cove.

The sea was slow moving, mighty, and almost black, save far away at the foot of Third Cliff, where it broke with a sinister roar against the rocks, and shot a white cloud of spray high in air. Here and there were vari-colored specks—lobster-pot buoys; and close up in the foreground lay two large motor boats tugging savagely at their anchors. Cicely could barely make out the names—the *Pyramid* the nearer one, and *Maid-of-the-Sea* farther out.

"Ain't nothin' particular mean about the sea when the whitecaps are arunning," the

aged Cap'n remarked to her sociably, "it's just tricky, like a playful purp. But when it's still, and slick, and greasy lookin' like it is now, a man ain't got no more chance than a jay bird in—" He didn't finish the sentence. "Likely lookin' la'nches out there, ben't they? Them two big ones, I mean. They came in last night."

"The *Pyramid!*" exclaimed Cicely. "Isn't that a silly name for a boat?"

"Look like they might go some—both on 'em," the old man commented. He turned and looked down upon her disapprovingly. "That water ain't safe to-day. You ain't agoing in it?"

"Certainly I am."

"Better not," he warned her.

"Oh, I swim rather well," she assured him. "I'm not afraid."

"Them's the only kind we ever have to haul out," he informed her placidly, "them as swims rather well and ain't afeard. If you was my daughter you wouldn't go in it."

"How would you prevent it?" There was a disdainful smile in Cicely's lips, willfulness in the blue, blue eyes.

"If you was my daughter and wanted to go in water like that I'd spank you!" With

which declaration of principles the old Cap'n stalked away through the sand.

Half an hour passed. Two men appeared on the deck of the *Maid-of-the-Sea*, dropped the tender from its davits, and rowed ashore. There was something vaguely familiar in the figure and carriage of one of the men—the one who leaped out upon the sand of the beach—and Cicely caught herself staring at him curiously. Somewhere, sometime, she had seen him, but where—where? As a matter of fact it was Detective Meredith of New York. Dexter, who remained in the tender, rowed back to the *Maid-of-the-Sea*.

In all the glory of striped lavender and black bathing trunks Skeets Gaunt came down the beach just in time to see Cicely taking to the water. He called to her and she paused, with the miniature waves hissing about her feet. Skeets came on the run—into the glare of disapprobation from her eyes.

"I told you—" she began.

"If you will listen just a minute," he pleaded.

"I will not listen!" she declared hotly. "If I had known my mother had ever thought of doing so foolish a thing as to ask you to

be our guest I should have—oh, I don't know what I shouldn't have done!"

"But, Helen—Cicely—you said—"

"And if you," she raged, "had had one spark of consideration for me you would have declined her invitation. The idea! After all that's happened!"

She walked out until the water caressed her knees, then plunged headfirst into an incoming billow, leaving Skeets angry, speechless on the shore. He was vaguely conscious that an ideal was crumbling! Phew! Temper, that's all it was! A pleasant companion for a rainy Sunday! If *she* would only show *him* some consideration!

Angry, without knowing why, Cicely swam on into the open on the breast of the ebbing tide, her sensuous red hair floating cloudily on the water, like brick dust. On past the *Pyramid* she went, and on past the *Maid-of-the-Sea*, heedless of all else save her anger.

Skeets was aroused from an enveloping lethargy of gloom by a sharp cry which came faintly over the water. Instinct told him what it was—Cicely was in trouble! She had turned shoreward, and out beyond the two motor boats was struggling against a treacherous sea which irresistibly swept her

back. With no thought of the dory near by, with no thought of his own weakness as a swimmer, with no thought in all the wide world except to get to her, Skeets ran headlong into the curling surf, and started. It was the spirit of old John Gaunt!

Again came the cry, stifled, gasping, choking; and simultaneously appeared on the deck of the *Pyramid* a young man in bathing tights—slender, almost boyish in figure, lithe, powerful, sinewy—built like a steel bridge. Over the side of the boat he went with a mighty splash, to reappear half a minute later, swimming sailor fashion, almost on top of the water, toward Cicely. There was grace, and ease, and power in the stroke—haste without hurry. Skeets, already weakening and tossed by the merciless tide, saw him, but swam on valiantly.

Within five feet of Cicely, now barely able to keep afloat, Bruce Colquhoun paused, trod water, and looked her over critically. The girl reached for him, and failing, vanished for an instant. He waited calmly until the red head bobbed up again.

"Now don't grab me!" he commanded.

"I understand," she gurgled.

"Put your hand on my shoulder and take it easy."

She nodded, unable to speak. He came nearer, and an instant later her slender fingers found a resting place in the shoulder strap of his bathing shirt. Mechanically she continued to kick.

"Stop that!" Bruce ordered abruptly.

Even in her present condition of exhaustion Cicely resented the tone, but as Bruce turned and swam slowly, fighting every inch of his way, toward the *Pyramid*, it was good to feel the rhythmical ripple of the sinews under the velvet of his skin—good to know that here was the placid strength that meant life. All things seemed to be growing hazy. She didn't remember if she was angry with Skeets. It didn't really matter! There was just one thought in her mind: "Don't grab me!"

Skeets, swimming from shore, was no more than half way to the *Pyramid* when, buffeted and hammered, he felt the weakness of exhaustion, and it was sheer will—the will of old John Gaunt—that kept him afloat.

After a long time an angel came, an angel in a dory. An oar was thrust toward him, and a calm voice suggested: "Take hold of

this." He remembered vaguely that the angel—a woman angel!—hailed him aboard the rocking boat, and then—all was blank!

"If," hazily as if in a dream Cicely heard the words, "if you'll hang on to the stern of this boat a minute I'll climb aboard and haul you up."

She felt herself being lifted, and her hands closed on a brass rail to which she clung desperately. Ages elapsed. Then her grip on the rail was rudely broken, and she was lifted straight up from the sea by her extended arms, and planked down on deck, sitting. Again ages passed.

A thin stream of something hot and stinging trickled down her throat, and she opened her blue, blue eyes.

"You ought to know better than to go in water like that!" So, frowningly, her rescuer. Not a word of sympathy, or solicitude—only the curt, crisp rebuke of a rather good-looking young man with wavy brown hair. "You should have known better."

For no reason at all Cicely suddenly felt like crying. He was scolding her—scolding *her*—Helen Hamilton—that is, Cicely Quain; she had never been scolded in her life and he, an utter stranger, was *scolding* her!

The inclination to weep was lost in a weak little wave of indignation.

"I'm not usually in the habit of—of consulting strange young men as to what kind of water I get into," she retorted. She felt, somehow, that was the right thing to say.

'Well, if you've no more judgment than you showed to-day you'd better consult *somebody*." Bruce pulled a pillow through the window of the cabin and placed it behind her back. "Being a strange young man, I'll introduce myself. My name is Colquhoun—Bruce Colquhoun."

"And my name is—is Cicely Quain."

"Here, take another swallow of brandy."

"I don't want it."

"Take it!" That's all there was to it; a quick, abrupt command. She took it.

"Cicely Quain! That isn't the name I saw under your picture in all the New York newspapers the other day."

"Indeed?" It was very inadequate, but it was all she could think of; and the brandy burned her throat.

"You are Helen Hamilton of New York," said Bruce. "I know you, of course."

"I'm not! My name is Cicely Quain."

"Have it your way, then." Whereupon

her rescuer made a megaphone of his hands and bawled to some one on shore: "Is he all right?"

"Yes," faintly came the answer in a woman's voice.

Was who all right? Cicely wondered. But, really, it didn't matter. She was very tired, very sleepy. For an instant she closed her eyes. It was indignation alone that caused her to open them again.

"You are used to having your way, I imagine," Bruce was saying.

"I'm not," she denied.

"You are willful and spoiled."

"I'm not."

"And argumentative," he added.

"I am not!"

"You are proving everything I say. It was sheer willfulness that made you go into dangerous water to-day. No sane person would have attempted to swim in it."

"You were going to swim," she pointed out, almost triumphantly. "You're dressed for the water."

"The ocean is my bathtub," he informed her. "I was merely going over the side and crawl back and have some breakfast."

Breakfast! It seemed ages since breakfast.

He hadn't had breakfast; and it must be nearly noon. It seemed strange, and sad, and important out of all proportion!

"I'm a very good cook," she murmured irrelevantly.

"So am I."

Came a hail from the beach and he turned. A dory was putting out—a dory in which sat Skeets Gaunt, himself again, thanks to the ministrations of Cap'n Barry and the girl who had rescued him. August von Derp was at the oars; he rowed, even, with that singular mathematical precision that had once before attracted Skeets' attention to him.

"If I'm not mistaken, some one is coming for you," Bruce told her. "Take a word of advice from me. Go home and go to bed, and hereafter don't go in water like it is to-day."

"I object to you telling me—"

"I know you do," Bruce interrupted. "You are spoiled. You don't like any one to tell you what's best for you."

Cicely struggled to her feet in a rage; and wobbled weakly on the swaying boat. There was something placid, and complacent, and masterful about Bruce Colquhoun—some-

thing that angered her. He had talked to her as if she were a child! She stamped one foot.

"I'll have to thank you, of course, for saving my life," she began, grudgingly.

Bruce shrugged his shoulders, and idly took a half hitch in an awning line.

"But—but—I don't think—"

"Your friends are here."

"Cicely!" Skeets, standing in the dory, was calling.

"But, I'm sure," the girl rushed on, "that you are the only man in the world who would have taken advantage of my position to be so—so offensively frank."

Bruce stared straight into the blue, blue eyes, then coiled a line and flung it to the dory. Skeets caught it, and they pulled alongside. Cicely declined his assistance, but stepped into the dory with smouldering eyes. While Skeets busied himself making her comfortable, von Derp took advantage of the delay to thank Bruce.

"If you'll permit me, Mr.—?"

"Colquhoun."

"Mr. Colquhoun," von Derp pronounced the name curiously, "if you'll permit me, I'll express to you on behalf of Mrs. Quain her

thanks for your heroism in saving her daughter's life. She has heard, and is almost prostrated."

"Be good enough to convey my compliments to Mrs. Hamilton," Bruce said distinctly, "and assure her that my services would not have been necessary if her daughter had had the discretion to remain out of dangerous waters."

Von Derp looked slightly bewildered, then lifted his hat, bowed elaborately, and rowed away. Bruce Colquhoun caught a noon train into Boston. Curiously enough, Dexter, too, was on that train. Later in the day von Derp went up to drive down a new motor car he had just purchased.

That night happened the first of a series of mysterious robberies. It was the burglary of a splendid mansion in Brookline, a suburb of Boston—the Holmes place. Jewels and plate valued roughly at forty thousand dollars were taken. On a table in the dining room a card was found. It bore one line:

"Regards to Mr. Meredith.

"THE HAWK."

CHAPTER VI

SOME one has said somewhere at some time something to the effect generally that if one pursues fame, or fortune, or woman—really, I've forgotten which—she will flee him; but if one flouts her, she—fame, or fortune, or woman, whichever it happens to be—will come and eat out of his hand. I'm not certain as to the phraseology of that opinion, but I can vouch for the truth of it. I know, because this very thing happened in the case of Cicely Quain *vs.* Skeets Gaunt, August von Derp, Bruce Colquhoun, *et al.*

Skeets adored Cicely with an ardor proven by his foolish but none the less heroic effort to save her life—and she was not even courteous to him; August von Derp's attitude was made plain by an occasional word and a worshipful humility in his eyes—and she never gave him a thought.

But Bruce Colquhoun! He had scolded her, flouted her, almost insulted her—and she couldn't drive him out of her mind. There was something mysterious, compelling, fascinating in his masterful arrogance;

and in spite of herself she was attracted to him by the very qualities which, ordinarily, would have repelled her. Logically, therefore, she hated him for it. But one can't really make a good job of hating unless one constantly bears in mind the object of hatred, so Cicely found the memory of Bruce Colquhoun always with her.

There were moments when she caught herself remembering, with an odd little thrill and quickened pulse, the rhythmical ripple of the sinews under the velvet of his skin as he had fought for her life, and his own, against that treacherous tide. Even in the haziness of utter exhaustion she had been so certain of him! Always the memory brought a flood of color to her cheeks; then, mockingly, would come the thought that he had scolded her—*scolded her!* And so she would fall to hating him again.

On the morning following the near-tragedies Skeets cornered Cicely in the pergola of the Italian garden at Stepping Stones, and there made an issue of his affairs.

"I won't permit you to make a fool of me!" he declared, quite unlike a poet. "You did love me once until that silly thing about stealing jewels, and garters, and things—"

"Why," and Cicely was staring into the void of heaven with lackluster eyes, "why did you steal them?"

"I didn't steal them! You know I didn't steal them! Anybody with horse sense could see—"

"I beg your pardon!" And the blue, blue eyes flashed into his with sudden fire. "I beg your pardon!"

Skeets felt chilled to the bone; wisely he relinquished his tone of bluster.

"You know I love you, don't you?"

"Then, why did you steal—"

"And you did love me," Skeets hastened on. "Now why this misunderstanding?" She didn't say. "If you loved me ten days ago well enough to elope with me, and if I am innocent of all these absurd charges, why this—this—*this*?" He gave it up. "Why are you so different?"

"Oh," languidly, "just because."

"Because—what?"

"Oh, Skeets, you annoy me. I don't know whether I love you or not. I don't think I do. You are a nice boy, and you were very brave yesterday when you were almost drowned, but— Run along now, like a good fellow." She regarded him curiously. "I—

I don't think I ever loved you at all. Isn't it funny?"

Skeets arose, glared at her for an instant, and took his outraged vanity away with him, down the drive. His step was singularly jaunty in one who had just met an emotional deathblow. He'd go straight and thank that girl who had hauled him out of the water. Already he had thanked her twice, and sent flowers, and called; but her hair, too, was brick red; and her eyes, too, were blue, blue! Gad, he'd thank her once more for luck! Mercy Dale! That was her name, a curious old New England name, quaint and sweetly pretty.

Cicely was aroused from her dreaminess by the precise voice of von Derp. His new motor car, which he had driven down from Boston that morning, stood in front of the door—lean, and gray, and powerful looking. He was asking her to join him for a spin through the country, but it was only an excuse to make love to her, so she shook her head. Why would men insist on making love to her? She was in no mood for it. She'd stroll down to Peggotty Beach away from it all, and leave von Derp to ride alone. She might see Colquhoun, of course, but he

at least wouldn't make love to her. He might scold her again, but he wouldn't make *love* to her. By this time he must have received her contrite little note of apology and thanks, for he *had* saved her life; and with it, her mother's note inviting him to call at Stepping Stones so that she, the mother, might thank him personally for his heroism.

Apparently von Derp dismissed the idea of a drive, and adapting his step to hers, walked along beside her. Vaguely she was conscious of a running stream of small talk which seemed as endless as it was useless. She wondered if Bruce would accept her mother's invitation! Ceaselessly von Derp's voice rippled through her moodiness.

"I count myself most fortunate that your father should have so signally honored me," he was saying.

"How?" Cicely queried, dully.

"By admitting me to the inner circle of his family, as he has done," was the reply. "Friendships made in that way are lasting, and sometimes they lead—"

Cicely turned squarely and faced him. There was a belligerent gleam in the depths of her eyes, and the rosebud lips straightened

themselves into a thin line. Coolly she surveyed him from his lemon-colored hair to his speckless boots, corking down in her mind his every oddity of dress and person.

"Sometimes they lead—where?" she demanded.

The yellow-topped exquisite shrugged his shoulders and didn't say. Misinterpretation of her mood was impossible. He had chosen the wrong moment, and was quick to see it.

They walked on in silence, past the little cottages, until the beach opened before them. The *Pyramid* bobbed idly on a sea as blue as turquoise; and out a little farther the *Maid-of-the-Sea* lazily strained at her anchor. Her tender was just putting off, with two men in it.

Again Cicely was struck with the thought that somewhere at some time she had met one of these men. She paused and watched him curiously as he landed and came toward her. He would have passed on, heedlessly, but she recognized him and in her surprise involuntarily called his name.

"Mr. Meredith!"

He looked up quickly and stopped.

"Why, it's Miss—"

"Quain," she interrupted quickly. "I met

you in New York a few days ago, you remember, in the—"

"I remember perfectly." The detective's eye traveled up and down the immaculate figure of von Derp, after which he turned to the girl again, inquiringly: "Quain? Why are you here?"

"My mother and I are in—in retirement, shall I say?" Cicely explained. "We've been here more than a week."

"I see," Meredith commented.

"But why—why are *you* here?"

The detective glanced again at von Derp, meaningly. Cicely took the hint.

"Mr. von Derp, allow me—Mr. Meredith," she introduced. "Mr. von Derp is a friend of my father's."

The two men shook hands, Meredith with the scant courtesy of a busy man, and von Derp with an elaboration of detail which made a social function of a simple introduction.

"What name, please?" asked the detective.

"Von Derp—August von Derp, of Holland."

"Von Derp," Meredith repeated. "Once I make sure of a name I never forget it, any more than I ever forget a face." Von Derp

smiled courteously; Meredith turned to Cicely: "Why am I here? I'm here because—"

And he stopped abruptly, as if amazed. Coming across the sands toward them was Bruce Colquhoun. With no word of excuse or explanation Detective Meredith left them and hurried forward to meet Bruce. They came face to face, out of hearing of the girl and her companion.

"You found it necessary to stay in town *all night*, I see?" There was marked emphasis in the detective's voice, almost an accusation in his direct gaze.

"I judge from your manner that you didn't expect me to come back at all?" Bruce remarked, crisply. "Am I right? Very well, I'm here. I shook off your man Dexter ten minutes after I reached Boston. He's a child at trailing. Tell him so, with my compliments."

Meredith's teeth snapped. He too, like Cicely, felt the strength of this man behind the placid exterior.

"And it was absolutely *necessary* to shake him off?" he demanded.

"To do what I had to do, yes." Bruce was quite calm about it. "I thought I'd

convinced you that I'm not the man you want?"

"You have," Meredith assured him, with an inward smile at some subtle thing which was not apparent. "You have *convinced* me, but you haven't *proved* you are not the man I want. I'm going to ask you to prove it, now."

"Very well. How?"

"I'm going to ask you," and the detective spoke measuredly, meaningly, the while his keen eyes searched the undisturbed face of the young man, "I'm going to ask you to write a few words on a slip of paper for me!"

Colquhoun merely stared at him questioningly. If there was anything save a question in his countenance it was not given to the New York man to fathom it; or even to isolate it.

"Is that all?" Bruce asked. "Just what words, may I ask?"

"I want you to write the words, '*Regards to Mr. Meredith,*' and sign it, '*The Hawk!*' "

"Oh, just a trifle of forgery, eh?" Colquhoun taunted. "So, you're going to connect me with that Brookline affair? Very well. I'll write it for you—but in the presence of

witnesses. Here are two—Mr. von Derp and Miss Quain. They'll do."

Cicely was distinctly disappointed, and fuel was added to her indignation by the fact that Bruce didn't once ask, in greeting her, how she felt, or whether she had recovered, or—or anything important like that. Instead he merely lifted his hat, bobbed his head, and then curtly:

"Mr. Meredith requests me to write a phrase for him," he explained. "I've agreed to do it in the presence of witnesses. I have a fountain pen here. Please remember the phrase: '*Regards to Mr. Meredith. The Hawk.*'" He was writing as he spoke. "In the upper right-hand corner of this slip of paper I am placing a distinguishing mark so that by no chance will this particular slip ever be confused with another. Please observe it."

He had written on the back of the long pocket-book which contained the Countess of Salisbury's garter! He held the paper in front of Cicely and von Derp. Within a circle he had made three hieroglyphs.

"Letters of the Phoenician alphabet, that's all," he explained as he handed the slip to Meredith. "I'll tell you that, to relieve the

convolutions of brain which may afflict your handwriting expert when he sees them. I'll ask you, Miss Quain, and you, Mr. von Derp, to remember that I called attention to them."

There was a ludicrous expression of cunning gone wrong on the face of Detective Meredith, and into that of von Derp came a change, too—a subtle nothing that might have been comprehension, or again it might not have been.

"If you'll express to your mother, Miss Quain, my appreciation of her invitation to call I shall be deeply obliged," Bruce continued casually. The girl was staring at him, wide-eyed; all at once everything seemed so mysterious, and intangibly threatening. "I shall give myself the pleasure of seeing her this afternoon; that is, of course," and he questioned Meredith with his eyes, "if a certain legal paper, issued by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, is not served upon me before? In that event I'll be compelled to run over to New York?"

It was a question, a taunt, a blatant jeering at the long arm of the law. He was referring to the new warrant which Meredith had in his pocket; the detective understood, and shook his head sadly.

CHAPTER VII

WITH that precious specimen of Bruce Colquhoun's chirography clasped fondly to his bosom, Detective Meredith went tearing out of Satuit into Boston with a low, rushing sound. There, in the lair of the handwriting expert, he hoped for just one word to connect the message left by The Hawk in the Brookline robbery with its verbal duplicate obligingly furnished by Bruce Colquhoun—for one word would be as illuminating as a searchlight on this odd problem of identity. Automatically, the vacuum created by the detective's departure was filled by the appearance in Satuit of half a dozen keen, shrewd-eyed plain-clothes men summoned from New York. Dexter, seemingly, had vanished into thin air.

Meredith hoped for the best without expecting it. The more he considered it the more improbable it seemed that Bruce would have so willingly given the specimen asked for if he had written the one found after the robbery. Then, too, there was a possibility that The Hawk in person had not written this last at all. He must have had an accomplice,

or accomplices, so— But anyway it was worth while submitting the two to an expert for his opinion! And Meredith compelled himself to hope for light.

Professor Wayne, often employed by the police department of Boston, made an immediate comparison of the two specimens of handwriting to oblige the impatient New York officer. For two hours or more he labored in silence with enlarging camera, magnifying glasses, microscopes, acids, and what not. Meredith's eyes were fairly blazing when the expert turned to him at last.

"It's the same handwriting," said Professor Wayne. "The specimens were written under different conditions, at different times, with different pens and ink, but the habits of the pen—"

"Never mind the details now," the detective interrupted. "It is the same, beyond doubt?"

"It is."

"You will swear to that in a court of law?"

"I will."

A great joy was bubbling in Detective Meredith's heart. At last he was about to put his hand on The Hawk! He had no fear

of Bruce Colquhoun's escape, for half a dozen men were there with orders to keep him in sight every moment. And while he was at it, he'd just cinch his proof against Colquhoun. Straightway he went to another handwriting expert; the words of two on this one point would be incontrovertible!

Meanwhile, in Satuit, Detective Meredith's instructions were being followed minutely by his half dozen satellites. Two of them were lounging on the beach when Bruce Colquhoun came ashore from the *Pyramid*, and he paused to stare at them curiously with a singular grim tightening of his lips before he turned into the winding road toward Stepping Stones. One of the men sauntered on after him idly, whipping the roadside weeds with a slender switch.

Bruce stopped abruptly and waited for him to come up.

"You're one of Meredith's men, aren't you?" he asked, briskly.

"I—I beg your pardon?" The plain-clothes man was obviously disconcerted.

"I merely wanted to know," Bruce explained, "I don't mind if you follow me about; but I *must* know who you are." A boisterous wind obliged him; it flipped open

the coat of the plain-clothes man, showing his badge. "Oh, all right!"

Bruce went on up the road. Cicely Quain, coming down the drive from Stepping Stones on her way to the village, nodded to him brightly, and he walked on beside her. The man who had been following Bruce dropped back; another idler, who had paused on the causeway to toss stones into the tide, took up the trail. At this man, too, Bruce had stared curiously for an instant.

All conversations begin with banalities; this one did. The interchange of small talk, however, gave Cicely opportunity to study this mysterious young man, and she did it at her leisure from beneath the wide sun hat which shadowed the blue, blue eyes, and darkened the brick red of her hair. She insisted to herself that she still hated him; but a woman's curiosity is greater than a simple little passion like hate.

"I—I didn't know you were acquainted with Mr. Meredith?" Cicely remarked, irrelevantly.

"I only met him the other night," Bruce explained. "I almost shot him."

Cicely gave him a quick, startled look; he didn't seem to notice.

"Why?"

"He came blundering aboard my motor boat when he had no business there," he told her placidly. "I wasn't certain who it was, and if I hadn't recognized him I should have killed him."

That stopped the conversation for a few minutes. Somehow Cicely couldn't think of the next thing to say, though her curiosity was nearing the boiling point.

"How did it happen?" she asked at last.

"Meredith chased me all the way from New London in the *Maid-of-the-Sea* under the impression that I was another man. I tried to escape under the impression that *he* was another man. It seems we were both mistaken."

"Does that account for that—that curious thing about—that thing where you wrote something and gave it to him?"

"Yes," Bruce elucidated tranquilly. "He still thinks I'm the other man, but he can't prove it."

"Who is he—this other man?"

"A notorious criminal—The Hawk, Meredith calls him. It seems he is wanted for murder, and jewel thefts, and all sorts of things, among others complicity in the disappearance of your jewels."

"Oh!" Cicely was staring up into his face with wide-open eyes. "If he thinks you are The—The Hawk, why don't you tell him who you *really* are?"

"It's none of his business."

"But he's a detective?"

"That doesn't make it his business to know who I am. It is sufficient for him to know that I am not The Hawk."

There was a tiny gleam of indignation in the girl's eyes, glowing spots in her cheeks. Helen Hamilton's father, under similar circumstances, would have expected a storm.

"No honorable man," she declared, "would have any objection to the world knowing who and what he is."

"Do you think so?" He didn't seem to be offended.

"I do," emphatically.

"Well, you don't know what you are talking about."

The glowing spots in Cicely's cheeks spread until her face was suffused—she was just plain mad at the calm insolence of this—this creature! Her small hands closed angrily.

"Being of the world, I personally should like to know who you are," she taunted. "Of course, if there is anything disreputable in—"

"I am Bruce Colquhoun," he said.

"But beyond that?" There was mockery in her voice. "Don't you dare say? Am I to assume after all that Mr. Meredith is *not* mistaken?"

"It's immaterial to me what you assume. I can't tell you who I am."

"You mean you won't?"

"If you prefer it that way."

Cicely laughed, not because she was amused, but high tempers grow under red heads; and some laughs are merely outward manifestations of high tempers. Turning, Bruce regarded her gravely.

"It's very mysterious, and theatric, isn't it?" she demanded. "Really, I find it most amusing! A man afraid and ashamed to say who he is!"

Came some subtle change in Bruce's manner. For an instant he stared at her—stared until the color paled in her cheeks and the mockery vanished from her lips. There was something deep in his eyes that moved her strangely; she was seeing through a mist.

"I should like very much to make you understand," he said slowly. "I don't believe it has ever occurred to me as worth while to try to make any one else understand.

But if I told you the reason for the necessity of concealing my identity, you would either laugh, or not believe me?"

It was a question. Cicely felt vaguely that she was being put upon honor, and being Cicely, she resented it.

"I don't always laugh," she retorted, "and sometimes melodrama is good enough to believe."

"I'll go so far as to say that Bruce Colquhoun isn't my name at all," Bruce continued gravely, "any more than Cicely Quain is yours. I'll go farther, and say that my life may depend upon my ability to keep my identity secret. It *is* melodrama, isn't it? Very well. With your permission, now we'll change the subject."

He glanced behind them; Meredith's satellite was still trailing at a respectful distance.

Cicely's brain was in a tumult. He was masquerading; Bruce Colquhoun *wasn't* his name! His life was in danger, he had said. Was he The Hawk? As she understood it, The Hawk's life was forfeit to the law for murder! Was he—? The thought startled her, frightened her! Her mother had received him in their own home. Suppose he *should* be! Of a sudden she was seized with fear.

Her first thought was to leave him there in the road. A half cry rose to her lips; there was horror in her eyes.

"I beg your pardon, really," Bruce apologized in the same serious tone, and there was still that indefinable something deep in his brown eyes. "I didn't mean to frighten you. I'm not a thing to be afraid of."

The calm gravity of his voice dissipated the little panic which was upon her; she found herself standing her ground valiantly.

"Why—why do you stay here?" she asked with an odd tight feeling in her throat. "Why don't you go?"

"I have no intention of going," was the reply, and again he gazed gravely into the blue, blue eyes until she looked away, embarrassed. "I like it here."

Yet ten minutes later, as they sat together on the veranda of the quaint little tea room where three charming ladies served them, he announced, without apparent reason, a possible change in his plans. He had leaned forward to look at a stranger passing; Cicely's eyes followed his. The stranger was distinctly foreign in appearance; Italian or Russian, she judged hastily from the scant glimpse of him. Bruce settled back in his chair.

"There is a possibility, after all," he said quietly, "that I shall go away."

"Why?" Cicely's bewilderment was evident.

"Because," he replied enigmatically, "because that man is here!"

I'll go ahead of myself to say that Cicely hated Bruce Colquhoun so much that she was unable to sleep that night for thinking of him.

Dr. Harvey, the second handwriting expert to whom Meredith submitted The Hawk's message, together with the specimen of Bruce's chirography, handed them back, and shook his head.

"They are not the same," he said emphatically. "There is not a single point of resemblance between them."

"But—but—" And Meredith's mouth opened in his astonishment.

"There is absolutely not one characteristic in common; they are totally unconnected."

The detective went his way in a daze. He called Professor Wayne, whose expert opinion had been directly opposed to this, on the telephone.

"Who the deuce is this Dr. Harvey?"

Meredith demanded curtly. "Is he a first-class man? Does he know his business?"

"Dr. Harvey?" Professor Wayne repeated. "Why, to my mind he is the greatest handwriting expert in the world. I'd set his judgment before that of any man living. What did he say?"

Meredith didn't tell him.

CHAPTER VIII

"WHERE," asked Mrs. Quain at dinner, "where is Skeets?"

"He is down thanking Miss Dale for saving his life," Cicely told her.

"Where," asked Mrs. Quain, at luncheon on the following day, "where is Skeets?"

"He is down thanking Miss Dale for saving his life," Cicely responded as before.

"Again?" Mrs. Quain questioned with uplifted brows. "Or—or merely yet?"

Cicely shrugged her shoulders, and made it plain by a slight movement of her hands that the matter was of no consequence to her. Von Derp smiled with mathematical precision.

"Don't you think," he observed with a trifling cynical curl of his lips, "that he is grateful in excess of the actual value of services rendered?"

He may have intended it merely as a witicism, but Cicely didn't smile. Instead, she shot an antagonistic glance at von Derp, for after all, Skeets was her own personal property, and not a butt for a Dutchman to hurl ponderous jokes at! I am merely recording her own thoughts.

And, as a matter of fact, Cicely had done Skeets an injustice. He was *not* thanking sweet Mercy Dale. Already he had performed that matutinal rite, and now, with coat off and hair rumpled poetically, he was in the workroom of the tiny study on the lawn making some experiments in the gentle craft of verse writing. Here and there in some of his poems he was changing "Helen" to "Mercy"—not that he meant anything by it; it was purely an experiment. For instance:

"O Helen, thy hair is an aura of gold—

O Helen!

O Helen, thine eyes hold a secret untold—

O Helen!"

With a few deft strokes of his pen this had been transformed into a classical appeal, after this fashion:

"O Mercy, thy hair is an aura of gold—

O Mercy!

O Mercy, thine eyes hold a secret untold—

O Mercy!"

Skeets regarded this astonishing product of his labors with dubious eyes, then sighed deeply, and realized he was late for luncheon. As he entered the dining room with an

apology, Cicely smiled upon him dazzlingly, then ostentatiously tilted her charming nose at von Derp, who had dared to fling a casual javelin of wit in his direction. There had been a time only a day or so before when Skeets would have been ague-stricken with delight at that smile; now he inquired what kind of soup they had.

"We dine aboard the *Pyramid* to-night," Mrs. Quain announced. "Mr. Colquhoun assures me he can seat the four of us comfortably."

Cicely, von Derp, and Skeets glanced up at her simultaneously, with widely varying expressions. To Cicely had come a thought—had come, did I say? It had been with her constantly!—a thought of her conversation with Bruce on the day before; and here her mother, unconscious of the suspicions enveloping him, was about to accept his invitation to dinner! True, he might be all that he should be, and again he might be, for all they knew, The Hawk in person! There was always the chance that Detective Meredith was right.

"But—but, mother," she faltered, "are you sure we—we want to—to—"

"I'm sure I do," was the placid response.

"It threatens to be a distinct novelty. Mr. Colquhoun is the cook."

"But we don't know this man?" Cicely protested. "He may be anybody, an object of suspicion? He is a man of mystery, refusing to say who or what he is! He may even be a thief?"

"I have never had dinner with a thief," and Mrs. Quain smiled. "I'm sure I should enjoy it—once."

"Or—or even a murderer!" Cicely went on.

"Nor have I ever dined with a murderer," said Mrs. Quain, unruffled.

"The mere fact that he saved my life," Cicely continued desperately, "doesn't place us under any obligation to eat his dinners."

There was a curious smile on von Derp's face—a smile of toleration for the eccentricities of rich Americans, if Skeets' analysis was correct.

"What is the cause of all these suspicions?" Mrs. Quain queried of Cicely. "Mr. Colquhoun called here at my invitation, and I found him, outwardly at least, all that a gentleman should be. Why are you suspicious?"

"Oh, I don't know!" Cicely arose suddenly

and turned away from the table. She paused in the dining-room door, and faced them. "Did any of you ever hear of a notorious criminal called The Hawk?"

"The Hawk!" mused Mrs. Quain.

"The Hawk!" echoed von Derp.

Skeets' mind was far away, groping through a chaos of words for a rhyme for Mercy. The only one he could think of was Percy.

Helen ran on:

"This man Colquhoun is suspected of being The Hawk, and Detective Meredith is here trying to prove it. Don't ask me how I know, but I *do* know! I may add that The Hawk is, among other things, believed to have been concerned in the theft of my jewels."

She went out. Von Derp questioned his hostess with a glance. She smiled.

"It would be odd, wouldn't it, if it should develop that Mr. Colquhoun is The Hawk, and that he did steal Cicely's jewels, and later entertained us at dinner?" she asked. "If there had been any doubt as to whether or not we should have accepted his invitation, it is gone now."

Von Derp's eyes opened, then narrowed. It occurred to him suddenly that romance

always pictured beautiful maids as being peculiarly susceptible to the fascinations of good-looking young men who saved them from drowning; it behooved him to be up and doing. Wherefore it followed that he joined Mrs. Quain in the conservatory for his after-luncheon cigarette, and then and there put the case to her plainly.

In his earnestness Mrs. Quain saw him for the first time shorn of the trivial little niceties of manner which smacked so strongly of European boulevards—and she almost liked him for it. It was refreshing to see a young man eager, ardent, human in the sway of that greatest of all emotions—love. All at once he lapsed again into that precise, stilted, ultra-courteous way she disliked.

“I love your daughter,” he concluded, with an odd change in his voice. “I have not told her so, nor shall I until I receive permission to pay my addresses. I realize I am speaking now of matters which, properly, I should discuss with her father, but he is not here, and if you—”

“It’s a matter you will have to discuss with him,” Mrs. Quain told him gently. “And frankly, I don’t believe such—such an alliance would meet with his approval. I’m not

saying this to pain you; I'm saying it merely to save you a disappointment."

Von Derp bowed very low, and withdrew. A few minutes later Mrs. Quain saw his lean gray motor car swing down the driveway, and go scuttling off toward the telegraph office. He was driving. It was nearly six o'clock in the afternoon when he returned.

Bruce caught his guests, one after another, staring at him curiously as he received them aboard the *Pyramid*—an interest born, he was certain, of something they had heard concerning him. It could only be that. Twice he looked inquiringly at Cicely, and twice she looked away guiltily, her face rose-red. Suddenly she was overcome with the thought that she had betrayed his confidence—and it *had* been a confidence. All at once it seemed horrid, and unfair to him. If she had only stopped to think!

Bruce welcomed his guests, then with a word of apology vanished into the tiny galley, leaving them alone in the cabin. There was an odd little restraint over all—a silence born of some queer psychological condition. The silence was broken at last by Skeets, who had discovered a phonograph. He chucked it

over on a berth and began rummaging for the records. Finally:

"Where are your phonograph records?" he called.

"In one of the drawers of the table," and Colquhoun thrust his head out of the galley. "There beside you, Mr. von Derp."

He disappeared into the galley again. Von Derp pulled open the drawer under his hand and produced—the *photograph of the Countess of Salisbury's garter!* The effect upon him was electrical. Quickly he glanced toward the galley, and then, as some one started to ask a question, lifted one finger to his lips, warningly. When he spoke there was a queer obstruction, it seemed, in his throat:

"Here's a record, Mr. Gaunt," and he handed it to Skeets. Again with that significant command to silence, he replaced the photograph in the drawer and closed it, quickly. A moment, while the phonograph whined and broke into a band concert, then Bruce thrust his head out.

"Almost ready," he told them. "Miss Quain, come and serve the soup."

There was no will-you-kindly, or if-you-please, or by-your-leave—just a plain, unvar-

nished command to come and serve the soup. Cicely went. It didn't once occur to her to refuse, but there was defiance in the blue, blue eyes as she entered the tiny galley. He was going to scold her for repeating what he had said to her in confidence! She would brazen it out!

"You told them," he remarked quietly, as she stood beside him. It was not a question.

"Why shouldn't I have told them?" she taunted.

"No reason at all."

"It was only fair that my mother should—"

"Quite right," he agreed. "I don't mind. I merely wanted to understand."

The unexpectedness of his attitude left Cicely speechless for an instant, then:

"I—I didn't tell them all."

"Very well, I will."

The soup course finished, Bruce, with a word of apology, opened the drawer where von Derp sat and with no sign of embarrassment or uneasiness, took out the photograph and passed it to Mrs. Quain.

"Did you ever see that?" he questioned, and then, as he rummaged through the records: "There's a Caruso solo here somewhere. We'll have him with the fish."

With the reappearance of the picture there had come again across von Derp's face a fleeting tenseness; in the faces of the others was only curiosity.

"What is this?" asked Mrs. Quain.

"It's a photograph of an interesting historical relic," Bruce explained. "You know the tradition of the founding of the Order of the Garter in England? That is a representation of the original garter given to the Countess of Salisbury by Edward III. For many years the original lay in the British Museum, and photographs were made of it at that time. About a year ago the garter was stolen, and since then the police of the world have been searching for it. It is now supposed to be in the possession of a notorious American criminal, as I understand it—one, The Hawk, or George Harrington Leigh, as he was known at the time of his disappearance, six years ago." He hadn't looked up; he was still searching the records. "Ah, here's Caruso! Stick him on the machine there, Mr. Gaunt."

Bruce left dead silence behind him as he disappeared into the galley—dead silence and startled glances. For the first time the serenity of Mrs. Quain's face was disturbed.

Von Derp, oblivious of all, was staring, staring at the picture!

"I neglected to say," Bruce added cheerfully, as he reappeared at the head of the table and sat down, "that there is a vague belief among the police that I am The Hawk in person. I thought it only fair that you should understand."

Again dead silence! For some reason she couldn't have explained there came a sudden change in Cicely's feelings toward this man. Perhaps it was born of his candor; his willingness to make his position clear to those about him. After all, there is something admirable in the bold man regardless of what he may be. And if it should develop that Bruce Colquhoun and The Hawk *were* the same! Cicely flushed, then paled, at the thought. The silence seemed interminable.

"What an odd ring!" The necessity of saying something wrung the trivial remark from Cicely. The reference was to a ring on Bruce's left hand.

"'Tis curious, isn't it?" Bruce assented. "I picked it up in Russia." Then to Skeets: "What's the matter with Caruso? Won't he work?"

Skeets turned to start the phonograph, and

Bruce slipped off the ring and handed it to Cicely. She accepted it, and examined it. It was warm from contact with his hand!

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" she commented.

"If you'll accept it with my compliments I'll be pleased." Bruce added, courteously, "With your mother's permission, of course? It may serve to remind you to be more discreet in dangerous waters."

Mrs. Quain arched her beautiful brows, questioningly.

"In Russia, where I lived for many years," Bruce took the trouble to explain, "we give to the admirer that which is admired. If you'll permit your daughter to accept this? It's of no real value; it's only odd."

Mrs. Quain was never quite certain why she assented to the request; nor, indeed, was she certain of anything else particularly that came to pass during the remainder of the dinner. She, too, felt the curious, fascinating quality of the man of mystery.

Skeets was plugging along in his search for a missing rhyme. Once he grew desperate, and almost wished his name was Percy!

Mrs. Quain, at Bruce's right, became conscious suddenly of a tautening of his sinews—the rigidity of tense attention. She looked

up to find Bruce staring, with dead-white face, at a porthole directly over Cicely's shoulder. Involuntarily her eyes followed his. There, against the glass of the porthole, was a man's face! 'Twas only a fleeting glimpse she had of it, but even in that instant she seemed to isolate the foreign qualities in it. The features were of an Italian cast. And as they looked, it vanished.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Nothing." Bruce's tone was casual, but his quick eyes warned her to silence. "Pardon me a moment!"

He arose and went out on deck. For five, ten, fifteen minutes he was gone. When he reappeared her closest scrutiny of his features told her nothing; but he was dripping wet from head to toe.

"I tumbled overboard," he explained, tersely. "And, now if I may beg to be excused? I've received an unexpected summons to the city, and I must answer it." Inquiring glances were turned upon him. "No, I haven't been arrested," he assured them. "The Hawk isn't caught yet!"

There were two telegrams waiting at Stepping Stones—one for von Derp and one for

Mrs. Quain. Von Derp's was curt and to the point:

"My daughter's hand is pledged to another.

"BROKAW HAMILTON."

The telegram to Mrs. Quain was longer, and vastly astonishing to her:

"Immediate marriage of young Gaunt and Cicely absolutely imperative. May be the only way to save me from ruin. "BROKAW."

Without a word, Mrs. Quain handed the telegram to Cicely, who read it through twice, then sniffed.

"Well, of all the unreasonable requests!" she said.

CHAPTER IX

UNDER the watchful eyes of two of Meredith's satellites, August von Derp stepped into a dory on Peggotty Beach and rowed out to where the *Pyramid* was lazily swinging back and forth with the tide.

"Hello, aboard!" he hailed.

There was no answer. The dory bumped gently against the motor boat, and von Derp took a half-hitch around a chock. Again he hailed; still there was no answer. After a moment of hesitation he made fast and scrambled over the side, where he proceeded to thump lustily on the sliding door which led into the cabin. Meredith's men on shore watched him curiously as he pushed open the door and vanished down the companion-way.

For a minute or more von Derp stood motionless in the deserted cabin, with eyes darting hither and thither. Everything indicated that Bruce had departed hurriedly. The dessert dishes and coffee cups were still on the table; even the photograph of the Countess of Salisbury's garter lay where von Derp himself had placed it. On the floor,

soaking wet, was the clothing Bruce had worn the night before. He hadn't taken time, even, to wring them out.

All these things von Derp saw and understood. Whatever had been his purpose in boarding the *Pyramid* there remained no doubt of his intention, now that he had found her owner absent. It was to search. He went at the job deliberately, with a vast attention to detail. First there were the drawers of the gravity table. He pulled one open, stared into it until he had photographed the arrangement of its contents in his mind, then proceeded to haul everything out.

There were some thirty or forty phonograph records, two or three books in which he took no interest after glancing at the blank pages in front, a sextant, and a pair of pipes in a morocco case which bore the stamp of a dealer in St. Petersburg. Also, there were writing materials—pens, pencils, paper, blotting paper, and an airtight inkwell. All these things von Derp examined minutely, paying particular attention to the blotting paper. Finally he shook his head, and began to replace the various articles in the drawer. It was a tribute to the accuracy of his

memory that when he had finished even Bruce would never have known the drawer had been opened.

The big drawer on the other side of the gravity table contained only navigation charts and to these von Derp paid no attention. Instead he began systematically ransacking the lockers beneath the berths on the port side. Here he found table linen, bed linen, articles of personal apparel, a huge box of smoking tobacco, and another huge box of cigarettes—singularly enough, they were Regents. As von Derp noted the brand he smiled.

Without haste von Derp now turned his attention to the lockers on the starboard side. Apparently these were filled with clothing—overcoats, sweaters, flannels, tweeds, evening dress, shoes, collars, ties—all those things that make the outward man. Wherever there was a pocket von Derp's deft fingers found the bottom of it. He didn't shirk the labor, although nothing came of it.

The starboard lockers gone over to his satisfaction, von Derp leaned back in his chair and thoughtfully regarded the remaining lockers—those under the long seat in the bow. Once he started to light a cigar, but thought

better of it, for he blew out the match he had struck and dropped it on the floor; after which he picked it up and thrust it into his pocket. With the cigar fixed between his teeth, he turned his attention to his work again.

Here, for the first time, von Derp found locks to oppose him. With the thin edge of his knife blade he conquered the first lock without trouble—to find that the locker was empty save for a shooting belt with shells, a shot gun, a revolver, and three boxes of cartridges. He stared at these things without touching them, then carefully relocked the door. Silently, patiently, systematically as before, he began work on the second locker. It yielded at last—and he found inside only a tin case, this, too, locked.

There was a little smile of satisfaction on his face now—obviously, here was something promising at last. It was ten minutes before von Derp laid back the top of the tin case without force and without having defaced it with one tiny mark. Inside he found a roll of bills—seemingly four or five hundred dollars. He looked at them without touching them, closed and locked the tin box, replaced it in its receptacle, then locked that.

Remained only the slim chance of finding the thing he sought, whatever it was, in the little galley. No, here was still another chance—another locker beside the engine hood. Von Derp raised the lid; it was a tool box. He was about to turn away when he caught sight of a book of some sort thrown in carelessly with the tools. He dug it out—"Engine Troubles" was the title—glanced at the blank pages in front, and replaced it. A black smudge of oil on one hand was his reward for thoroughness. He wiped it off as best he could with his handkerchief.

The galley was here almost behind him. He turned and glanced in, and bracing himself with a hand on either side of the narrow door, stood for a moment appraising the contents of the tiny nook. It was as complete a miniature kitchen as he had ever seen, and generously stocked with stuffs secured in racks. Obviously, there was little need to search here, but—

Von Derp started forward eagerly, with a glitter of triumph in his eyes at something he had seen. It was a spindle on which were several sheets of paper. He slipped off the first. It was nothing more important than a laundry list, setting forth in due form that

Bruce Colquhoun was possessed of so many collars, and shirts, and socks, and so many other things—certainly nothing to arouse the tense interest von Derp displayed. It was not a printed slip, but a memorandum written evidently by Bruce himself for his own information.

There was something sardonic in von Derp's manner as he drew out his pocket-book, folded the slip carefully, placed it therein, then stowed it away again. In his eagerness he failed to notice that he had dropped another slip of paper!

When Bruce came aboard the *Pyramid* half an hour later he found von Derp stretched out at length in a deck chair smoking luxuriously and gazing out upon Bass' Cove with beatific satisfaction upon his face.

"Hello!" Bruce greeted.

"Good morning," von Derp returned. He arose ceremoniously and bowed with a perfect mechanical action. "I ran out to pay my dinner call, found the boat deserted, and made myself comfortable here. I was almost asleep."

Bruce regarded him absently for a moment, and his eyes swept the immaculate figure from the yellow hair to the white buckskin boots.

"Glad you came out," he remarked at last. "I want a little talk with you. Pardon me just a moment."

He disappeared down the companionway and shot a quick, searching glance about the cabin. Evidently he was satisfied, for he returned immediately.

"They tell me," von Derp remarked lazily, "that it's seven miles in an air line to that wireless mast on Brant Rock. It looks as if one might throw a stone and—"

"Mr. von Derp, you'll pardon me if I seem impertinent, won't you?" Bruce interrupted. "There are some things I'd like to know about you."

There was an expression of polite surprise on von Derp's face—nothing else.

"For instance?" he queried.

"I'd like to know who you are, where you came from, and satisfy myself that you're only what you seem to be!" Bruce stated it crisply, pointedly.

"I am August von Derp, son of Wilhelm von Derp, junior partner in the banking firm of Hegeman, von Derp & Company of Amsterdam, Holland," was the precise reply. "I came to this country on a jaunt, just knocking about, you understand; and among

other letters of introduction I brought one to Mr. Brokaw Hamilton in New York. He and my father are associated in business some way. I presented the letter to Mr. Hamilton, and he sent me along up here with his family."

The eyes of the two men met unwaveringly—von Derp's shallow, languid under his lemon-colored brows; in Bruce's there seemed to be only tense curiosity.

"I'm afraid I don't understand the last part of your question," von Derp continued, after a little. "Am I only what I seem to be! By that you mean just what?"

"I beg your pardon, really." There was crisp courtesy in Bruce's manner. "I'm afraid, sometimes, I'm too direct in what I say." Worried lines appeared suddenly in his smooth brow. "I can't explain, but it is very necessary that I know all about men with whom I come in contact. I've done you an injustice. Pardon me."

Von Derp waved his exquisite hands as if to dismiss the subject.

"I'm only curious to know what you think I might have been—or what you think I am," he said.

"I don't know that I can answer that

question," Bruce told him frankly. "There was something in your manner last night when you chanced upon that photograph of the Countess of Salisbury's garter that—that—I don't know what I did think. I merely got an impression that your interest in it was more tense than it would have been in an ordinary person."

"I think I comprehend," and von Derp nodded understandingly. "You yourself being under suspicion—I refer to it only because you did—you thought perhaps that I might be a—a detective, say?"

"No, it was hardly that."

"Or even perhaps The Hawk?"

Bruce made a quick gesture of impatience.

"It's absurd, all of it," he declared flatly. "If you'll be good enough to overlook what must seem to be an uncalled for interest in your affairs I'll be deeply obliged. I should have known, of course, that as a guest of the Quains—the Hamiltons—please pardon me." He arose abruptly. "I'm tired to death. Will you join me in a little Scotch?"

Bruce vanished down the companionway, and some subtle change came into von Derp's face. It was a curious hardening of his expression, a cunning glint in his shallow eyes.

Bruce reappeared with the glasses and decanter.

"I wonder," von Derp observed, "if you would answer the same question?"

"What question?"

"Who are you? Where do you come from? Are you only what you seem?"

"You have the advantage of me," and there was a trace of bitterness in Bruce's tone. "I can answer no questions whatever about myself."

"I wondered!" von Derp sipped appreciatively at the drink. "I wonder if you could answer a question as to what actually happened last night when you left the dinner table, and returned dripping wet?"

"Nor can I answer that," Bruce replied with darkening expression. "I can only say I anticipated a grave danger to all of us, and nothing happened. That danger still threatens me. That's all."

Oddly enough, it came to pass that two men who had regarded each other with open suspicion shook hands cordially when von Derp took his leave. Bruce spent the afternoon tidying up the *Pyramid*, and tinkering with her engine. Just before sundown he wrote a brief note to Cicely and, followed by

one of Meredith's men, walked over to the village post office.

Night came, a night of overhanging clouds, tangibly dark and moistly warm. From the deck of the *Pyramid* Bruce could see the bobbing night light of the *Maid-of-the-Sea*, less than a hundred feet away, seaward; and on shore, above the murmur of the ebbing tide, he heard her pilot, left in charge by Meredith, in loud conversation with old Cap'n Barry. There was no mistaking their voices. Wherefore it came upon him suddenly that the pilot, anxious for a bit of human companionship, had left the *Maid-of-the-Sea* deserted for the moment. He came to his feet quickly, and, after a long scrutiny of the skies, went below and pulled on his bathing trunks.

This done, Bruce placed a record in the phonograph and started it; old Cap'n Barry and the pilot of the *Maid-of-the-Sea* paused to listen. One record finished, there was a pause of perhaps five minutes; then Bruce put on another, and started that. As its first strains reached the ears of those ashore, Bruce slid silently over the side of the *Pyramid*, into the water, and struck out, swimming rapidly, for the *Maid-of-the-Sea*.

The record was still playing as he clambered up her side, darted into her cabin, disconnected her gasoline supply, stuffed the supply pipe with cotton, and slid back into the sea. He had almost reached the *Pyramid* again when the record stopped. Up her side he clambered, and thirty seconds later a new record was playing. Watchful as they had been, Meredith's men on shore had perceived no break in the music longer than was necessary to change a record.

'Twas less than a minute later that the great engine of the *Pyramid* sputtered as she was cranked, then settled down to a roar; the waves curled away from her bow and she was speeding into the open. Came a sudden hubbub on shore, a scampering of the pilot and Meredith's satellites, some picturesque profanity, and three men put out for the *Maid-of-the-Sea*, rowing madly. Bruce, running dark, looked back once, just before he rounded Second Cliff.

"It will take them an hour to get her going," he remarked to himself contentedly, "and by that time I ought to be off Hull."

So the hare was on her way again; the hound wallowed helplessly in the trough of the sea.

There was another great robbery in the suburbs of Boston that night, this being in Cambridge. The Weldon Blakes were the victims in this instance, losing jewels valued at about twenty thousand dollars. In this case, as in the other, a note was found:

"My compliments to Mr. Meredith.

"THE HAWK."

From gloomy contemplation of Bruce Colquhoun's daring escape in the *Pyramid*, Meredith was aroused to this new robbery. Stranger than any other feature of it, to him at least, was the fact that *this second note was in a handwriting totally different from the first!* He scuttled off madly to get the opinion of an expert, Dr. Harvey, on it. Again the tedious examination and comparison, after which:

"There are marked resemblances in this second note to the specimen you submitted with hieroglyphics in the corner," the expert declared, "*but they are not by the same hand.* There is great dissimilarity in the first note and the second, *but they are by the same hand!*"

Meredith toddled along to Professor Wayne.

"This second note," that learned gentleman asserted, "is unquestionably in the same

handwriting as the specimen with the hieroglyphics in the corner. That first note, therefore, *was not written by the individual who wrote either this second note or the hieroglyph specimen!*"

Meredith went away, holding his head.

CHAPTER X

"DEAR MISS QUAIN:

"I forgot to mention that there is a charm upon that ring—'whosoever hath this ring shall love me forever, and be beloved of me!'

"Sincerely,

"BRUCE COLQUHOUN."

Cicely read the note again, and yet again, the while a wistful tenderness crept into the blue, blue eyes and the tyrannical curve of her rose-red lips softened. It was not a surprise, this note; in her own mind she likened it to the writer—impertinent, mysterious, fascinating. Of course she would snub him for it when she met him again—that was his due for daring to write such a note; but after all, the foolish little ring was very dear to her! He had worn it—it had come to her warm from the touch of his hand! "Shall love me forever, and be beloved of me!" And even at that he might be a thief, a murderer!

Skeets came bustling in, fresh from his matutinal worship at the shrine of Mercy Dale. Cicely roused herself from a gentle reverie.

"Skeets, you don't love me, do you?" she demanded suddenly.

Skeets didn't know the answer. He stood stock still, twisting his hat like a bashful schoolboy, and looked her over questioningly.

"Why, ye-yes," he faltered. "I suppose I do."

"Suppose you do!" Cicely repeated disdainfully. "Tell me the truth! You don't love me!"

"Well—er—since the other day when you were so distant and—er—frigid, as it were, I don't quite—"

"Say it right out," Cicely commanded. "I don't love you, so you won't hurt my feelings."

Skeets drew a deep sigh of relief, after which he assumed a near-melancholic expression, and balanced himself on one foot.

"Since you put it that way," he confessed, "I don't mind saying that I'm not as strong for you as—"

"In other words, since Miss Dale hauled you out of the water!"

"She's beautiful, isn't she?" Skeets broke in irrelevantly, his poetic soul in his eyes. "Fresh, sweet, simple, unspoiled, and—"

"I know," Cicely nodded understandingly. "Now that we understand each other, I'll

tell you something. My mother has a telegram from my father in which he declares that I *must* marry you at once! *Must!* Do you understand?"

"*Must?*" Skeets repeated the word rebelliously.

"I'm sure I don't want to marry you, and I don't think you want to marry me."

"Well, let's don't!" It was a clever thought—for Skeets. "You know," he rushed on, "my father told me if I didn't marry you he'd give all his millions to the Fiji Islanders. Gad! You know, I think I'll let him do it. What would money be to me if the woman I loved—"

"It's a bargain then?" Cicely asked. "We won't?"

"We won't!" Skeets promised. They shook hands on it. Came another thought: "Is there another man?"

"Why?" Cicely parried.

"It's not von Derp?"

"No, it's *not* von Derp!"

"Good!" Skeets commented. "I don't like his yellow whiskers." He started upstairs, but paused at the door. "By the way," he added, "that chap we had dinner with *was* The Hawk."

Cicely came to her feet, crumpling the note in her slender fingers. For a scant instant her heart stood still, and words failed to come as she stared at the poet. He was frightened at her pallor and took a step forward.

"Has he been arrested?" Her question was almost inarticulate. "Has he confessed?"

Men are stupid creatures; ask any woman. Cicely's obvious agitation meant nothing to Skeets save in so far as it was a manifestation of outraged pride. They, Cicely and her mother, had dined with a thief and murderer!

"No, he has neither confessed nor been arrested," he explained. "But he made a getaway last night that left Detective Meredith and the flock of men he had here on watch gasping for breath. He swam out from the *Pyramid* to the *Maid-of-the-Sea*—they found his bare footprints on deck—and disconnected the carbureter, after which he stuffed the supply pipe with cotton. It took three men four hours to get the engine going. By that time—pssst!—the *Pyramid* was gone!"

"Then why," Cicely was breathing quickly, her small hands were still clenched, "why do you say he *was* The Hawk?"

"Oh, the mere fact that he ran away like that proves it," Skeets informed her. "But I wouldn't lose any sleep about it. He was an impertinent ass, anyway!"

Skeets went on upstairs. For a long time Cicely sat motionless, torn by emotions she had never known before. Finally she could stand it no longer. She flung a veil about the sensuous brick-red hair and started toward the beach. It just happened that Meredith, who had run down to Satuit in a rage to call off his ferrets—and incidentally to address them at some length on the general subject of stupidity—met her in the road.

"Well, he got away," he greeted her.

"You are the very man I wanted to see," said Cicely. "I want to ask you one question—you must answer it. Is Mr. Colquhoun a—a thief?"

"I wish I knew," said the detective ruefully.

"Or a—a murderer?"

"I can only say, Miss Hamilton—pardon me, Miss Quain—that I believe he is both a thief *and* a murderer."

"But you don't *know*?"

Meredith was gazing at her curiously. He shook his head.

"I don't *know!*" he confessed.

"And the mere fact that he—he ran away is not a confession of—of guilt?"

"It's against him, of course," Meredith said judicially, "but it is not a confession. Lots of innocent men get frightened and run away from us."

"And he *is gone?*" Cicely rushed on. "You've been unable to find him?"

"There's no trace of him yet," he said. "Ultimately, of course, we'll get him."

The crumpled little note slid from Cicely's nerveless fingers to the ground; the detective stooped courteously to pick it up. A glance at the superscription on the envelope and his eyes opened wide. With a little cry Cicely snatched it from his hand.

"That note is from Colquhoun." It was not a question. "I know his handwriting."

"It is, yes." There was calm defiance in Cicely's manner.

"Will you give it to me?"

"No."

"May I *see* it?"

"No!"

"Will you tell me what's in it?"

"I will not!" indignantly.

The detective plucked a white-headed flower

from a near-by weed, and whipped it idly against his knee.

"If," he asked, "if that note contained information as to the present whereabouts of Colquhoun, would you allow me to see it?"

"No."

"Will you give me your word of honor," and he was studying her white face tensely, "your word of honor that it contains nothing which would give a clue to his whereabouts directly or indirectly?"

"I will do that, yes—my word of honor!"

"That is sufficient."

Meredith bowed courteously and went on up the road, busy with his own plans. His fruitful field of investigation had suddenly become barren. He'd run by the post office, order his mail forwarded, and clear out of Satuit. For the present at least there was nothing to be learned here. At the post office he had another surprise.

In his mail there was one envelope bearing the return address of a big New York hotel, but the postmark showed it had been mailed in Boston on the previous night. The envelope had been directed on a typewriter. Meredith opened it. Inside he found a single sheet of paper, evidently a scrap of wrapping

paper; and roughly outlined upon it was a sketch of some sort. It seemed to be the interior plan of a residence, marked off into rooms, halls, closets—and against one of these closets was a blue cross. Here and there in the sketch were other cabalistic hieroglyphs. Beneath the sketch were some figures, and one word, arranged in this fashion: “21 Willow—7/3.”

On the night of the second day following, specifically the night of July 3, Detective Meredith and one of his able assistants crept silently into the big mansion, No. 21 Willow Street, in a suburb of Boston, and stationed themselves, one on each side of the closet against which the blue cross appeared in the sketch. The occupants of the house, Calhoun Manning and family, had been called to New York by a telegram early in the day. Stationed outside the building were four of Meredith's men, their orders being to interfere with no one who might enter the house, but to stop and hold any one attempting to leave it. So, the trap was set!

Ten o'clock struck, then eleven, twelve, one. Patiently the men waited, revolvers and flashlights in hand. The faint noises of the

night had died completely now; the silence was tense—it was the stillness of the tomb.

All at once, without having heard a sound, Meredith *knew* there was some one else in the room. His muscles grew taut! Five seconds, ten seconds! There was a faint creaking in the direction of the table in the center of the room!

Simultaneously the electric flashes of Meredith and his aid blazed in the direction of the table. Sitting upon it, placidly swinging his perfectly shod feet, was—von Derp! There was an unlighted cigarette in his lips, slightly parted in a smile which crinkled the corners of his eyes. His hat was pushed back so that the yellow fringe of his hair showed, and with one gloved hand he plucked thoughtfully at the point of his lemon-colored beard.

"Is that you, Meredith?" he inquired quietly.

"Yes, but—"

"Sh-h-h-h! Not so loud!" von Derp warned. He slid from the table and came toward the detective. "And shut off your light!"

"But—but what are *you* doing here?" Meredith was stammering in his amazement.

"Shut off your light, you fool!" It was a hissing command, as unlike the mathematically courteous von Derp as one could imagine. "And be silent! He may come yet, and I want him as much, or more, than you do!"

Insolence is bad medicine at times. It was in this instance. Meredith's face flushed, and he spoke to his assistant, in a velvety undertone:

"Just throw on those electric lights, Stallings." Silently Stallings obeyed the order, and von Derp, himself bathed in light, could see the two detectives for the first time. In the right hand of each was a revolver. He smiled cynically as he noted it.

"You want him as much or more than we do!" Meredith repeated, his keen eyes fastened upon the placid countenance before him. "You want—*who?*"

"Colquhoun—The Hawk!"

"Why do *you* want him?" Meredith pursued doggedly.

Von Derp's face showed clearly his astonishment at the question.

"You know who I am, don't you?" he inquired.

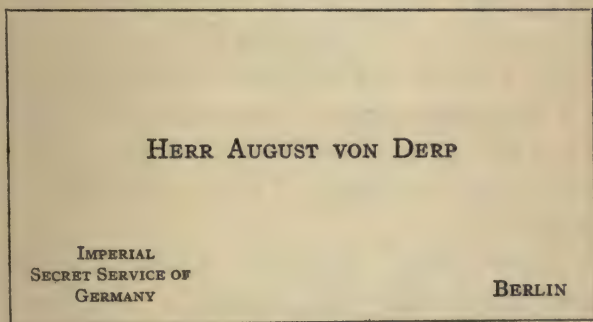
"I know who you say you are," Meredith replied. "There is no better time than the

present and no better place than here for you to give a detailed account of yourself; and among other things, you might explain your presence in this house at this time!"

Von Derp thrust one gloved hand into the breast pocket of his coat, and two revolvers clicked ominously in his face.

"Why, you two are regular policemen, aren't you?" he mocked. "Permit me to introduce myself." He took out an engraved card and handed it to Meredith. "I flattered myself that you knew me all along."

Meredith read the card:



Von Derp questioned the two men with his eyes; the mocking smile still played about his lips.

"Any one may have cards engraved," Meredith pointed out.

Von Derp laughed.

"You are—what is it you Americans say?—you are a Missourian, I see." Again he thrust a gloved hand into his breast pocket, this time to produce a packet of papers. To Meredith he handed these. "My credentials, signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany." Meredith glanced down the printed form of the signature. "And further," von Derp continued, as he threw back his coat and waistcoat and showed a small metal shield on his suspenders, "my badge of office."

Without a word Meredith folded the paper and returned it to von Derp, who accepted it with a smile and restored it to his pocket.

"I beg your pardon," Meredith said simply as he thrust his revolver into his pocket; Stallings did likewise. "May I ask why you are here?"

"I told you," was the reply. "I, too, want Colquhoun—The Hawk."

"How do you know he *is* The Hawk?"

"I don't know it, any more than you do. I only suspect it."

"And why do you—why does Germany want him?"

"Because he is believed to have in his

possession certain of the crown jewels of Germany," was the astonishing reply. "When I say I want him, I am not strictly accurate; I merely want the jewels."

Meredith didn't ask for details; came again into his face a shadow of suspicion.

"May I ask," he questioned, "how you happened to suspect that he would be here to-night?"

"May I ask," and for an instant there was a return of the mocking smile to von Derp's lips, "how *you* happened to suspect it?"

"I received anonymously a rough sketch giving the street and number, and a date. I worked it out. It seemed to point here. I came."

"It was I," and von Derp paused to light his cigarette, "who sent you the sketch. I credited you with intelligence enough to know what it meant, and you've vindicated my judgment. I knew you wanted to catch The Hawk red-handed, and had authority to arrest him—I have not. I merely wanted to be here when he was taken." He smiled ambiguously. "Also, I thought you'd know the handwriting on the sketch. It is mine."

"Oh!" said Meredith, after a long pause.

"Stallings, turn out the light. We'll wait awhile."

Von Derp made an impatient gesture with one hand.

"Of course The Hawk won't venture here now," he complained. "He's no fool. He won't walk into a house where a light has been burning for half an hour at this—"

"We'll wait awhile," Meredith repeated.

So, the three men waited. They were still waiting when the sun shot her first rays ahead into the dark. Nothing happened. Von Derp, Meredith, and Stallings left the house together.

"There's one little thing I neglected to tell you," von Derp remarked casually. "I made it a point to search the *Pyramid* the other day on a chance of finding something to interest me, but I didn't. However, there is something aboard the boat which might interest you."

"What is it?"

"A photograph of the Countess of Salisbury's garter."

Meredith's eyes opened wide, but he was silent.

CHAPTER XI

UNANNOUNCED, Skeets walked into his father's office in New York, put down his hat, and deposited himself on a chair, evidently for a long stay. Old John Gaunt looked up from his desk, then continued his writing.

"Hello," he greeted. "Where do you come from?"

"Massachusetts," was the reply.

"What have you been doing up there?"

"I went up there," Skeets particularized, "to carry out your wishes and win Helen Hamilton. I'm back now to say that I can't marry her because I don't love her."

"What!" John Gaunt roared, and he whirled around in his swivel chair. "You don't love her? You say that after all that gush you spilled in here about her?"

Skeets blushed modestly.

"I—I find that I was mistaken," he stammered. "I interpreted my feelings for her in the light of a stronger emotion, and—"

"And all those poems you've been writing to 'Helen'?" his father went on. "I ran through the files of your magazine the other

day to see if you were a good editor, and on every other page was something 'To Helen'! I will say this for 'em—they're funny! Gad! I don't know when I've enjoyed anything more!"

"As I said, I interpreted my feelings for her—" Skeets undertook to explain, with dignity.

"They remind me of that introductory verse to one of Bill Nye's books," old John Gaunt interrupted. "Ever read it? It goes something like this," and he quoted ponderously:

"Go, little booklet, go,
Bearing an honored name,
Till everywhere that you have went
They're glad that you have came.'"

"I'm sure there is no comparison—" Skeets began defensively.

"No, but you're improving," his father flattered. "I think toward the last they're funnier than your first ones were. You're all right, Sammy."

"Not Sammy, *please*, father!"

"And so, *Samuel*, you've found that you *don't* love Helen Hamilton?"

"Not in the way I thought I did—no, sir."

"Why?"

"I don't know," Skeets confessed, helplessly. "My viewpoint seems to have undergone some psychological change and—"

"And you *won't* marry her. Won't was the word you used?"

"I *can't* marry her. That was the word—*can't*! She doesn't love me."

"Impossible!" exclaimed John Gaunt. "She doesn't love you after all that chatter about—"

"It seems that she, too, misinterpreted—"

"She doesn't love you; you don't love her. Now is it possible for you to love *anybody*? Really *love* anybody?"

"It is." Skeets was quite firm about it.

"For instance?"

"I *do* love somebody."

"Who?"

Skeets picked up his hat and stroked it thoughtfully.

"A few days ago, father, Cicely—that is, Helen—was nearly drowned while swimming. In my efforts to get to her *I* was nearly drowned. I was rescued by a girl, and—"

"I know the rest of it. Who is she?"

"She's the daughter of a lobster fisherman and mosser in the little town of Satuit,

in Massachusetts. She is well educated—worked her way through Radcliffe, and all that—and sweet and simple as the delicate flower that blossoms unseen beside the—”

“I got you,” his father interrupted. “What does she look like?”

“She’s very much the same type as Cicely—that is, Helen,” Skeets explained. “Her hair is deep red, her eyes blue—blue as the—”

“Is she a good, clean American woman?” his father demanded.

“Yes, American to the core, a direct descendant of Mayflower ancestors, and—”

“What’s her name?”

“Miss Dale.” Skeets hesitated. “Mercy Dale.”

“Her name is—what?”

“Mercy—”

“Mercy?”

“Mercy.”

“Help! Where’d she get it?”

“It’s not an unusual New England name. I admire it very much.”

John Gaunt turned in his swivel chair and scribbled industriously for five minutes. Then:

“And you *won’t* marry Helen Hamilton?”

“No,” firmly.

“In spite of my expressed wishes?”

"I'll give up the money."

"You'd deliberately make a pauper of yourself for the sake of this—what's her name? Say it again."

"Mercy Dale!" Suddenly Skeets went white.

"And then, I suppose, you'd go out and dig ditches, and plow fields to support her?"

"I would, yes."

Old John Gaunt swung around in his chair again, and leaned back and laughed.

"Good boy!" he said admiringly. "You know, Sammy, I don't give a continental whoopee in the hereafter *who* you marry, so long as she is a good, decent, clean American woman. You've got the real Gaunt spirit. Good boy!"

Of necessity poets are psychologists, but Skeets couldn't quite fit any theory that happened to be around loose to this actual condition. He was pondering it when his father went on:

"The only reason I wanted you to marry Helen Hamilton, anyway, was to slip one over on her father. And now even that doesn't matter. Believe me, Sammy, I've got him in a deal and sewed buttons all up and down him, front and back. First thing

he knows I'll own his railroads. He called me a coal heaver, you'll remember. I've got him on the run. You know," shrewdly, and the eyes of this masterful old giant of finance snapped, "I've an idea that he'd like for you to marry his daughter now, if he thought it'd stop my fight on him."

Skeets was tempted to explain, in the light of his conversation with Cicely, but he didn't. His delicate poetic soul was appalled at the mercilessness of this financial warfare; he was silent.

"You know what Hamilton did the other day?" his father ran on. "He's had detectives on my trail for more than a fortnight—I don't know just why. The other day they went up and searched my house for some reason. I've got him on the run, sonny. Now get out of here. I'm busy. And give my blessings to Mercy."

On his way out Skeets met Dexter in the hall—Dexter of Scotland Yard, the gimlet-eyed sleuth who had been sent over to recover the Countess of Salisbury's garter!

CHAPTER XII

MRS. QUAIN'S tranquil face was furrowed by spidery lines of perplexity as she strolled down the wide lawn from the house and joined Cicely under the big apple tree beside the tiny study building. For the first time in her life she was laboring under the weight of a grave responsibility; and to her credit be it said that she met it dutifully, albeit unenthusiastically. Upon her, at the terse command of her husband, had devolved the unpleasant task of compelling a match between Cicely and Skeets Gaunt; and to her aid she had brought all her diplomacy, all her gracious tact, even maternal coercion—thus far vainly.

Cicely was sitting upon the grass, Turkish fashion, thoughtfully flinging unripe wind-fallen fruit into the thick multi-flowering hedge. She looked up, instantly on the defensive, and sighed wearily. Here was come her daily grilling.

"Has Skeets returned from New York?" Mrs. Quain questioned, as she sat down. She was sweetly oblivious of the smouldering rebellion in her daughter's face.

"Yes, he came this morning," Cicely replied, then pleadingly: "Now, mother, let's don't start it all over again."

"Where is he?"

"He's down thanking Miss Dale for saving his life," said Cicely.

"I had a long letter from your father this morning in which he explains that unless you and Skeets—"

"I understand, perfectly," Cicely interrupted. "If we don't get married immediately the whole world is going to the demnition bow-wows, and—"

"Cicely!"

"I don't care. I *won't* marry him, and," triumphantly, "he won't marry me. He's said so!" She flung a green apple spitefully and accurately at a strutting robin. "Why is a marriage between us so necessary all at once?" she demanded. "When I wanted Skeets I couldn't have him, and now that I *wouldn't* have him I *must* marry him?"

Mrs. Quain shrugged her shapely shoulders, and laid a graceful hand gently upon the wind-blown brick-red hair of her daughter. The tenderness of the caress brought a quick moisture to Cicely's blue, blue eyes; she seized the slim white hand and pressed it

to her hot cheek. Mrs. Quain, in silence, was staring out dreamily over the wimpling waters of the harbor.

"You know, mother," Cicely ran on in a strained, tense little voice, "I'd be sorry for you and Pops if he should be ruined financially, as he seems to think he will be if I don't marry Skeets, but I shouldn't mind being poor myself. I don't think it quite—quite *fair* that he should put all the responsibility upon me. I *don't* love Skeets; I thought I did, and I daresay if the elopement had—had been a success we would have been happy together, but now—not now."

"There is some one else. Who?"

"No one," Cicely denied.

"Is it Mr. von Derp?"

"No!" capitalized.

Another question trembled upon Mrs. Quain's lips, but she didn't ask it. Strange fears lie suppressed deep in a mother's heart! After a moment she went on:

"Did Skeets' going to New York have any connection with his—his refusal to marry you?"

Cicely bobbed her head vigorously; the latent fire in her brick-red hair leaped into flame.

"He went," she explained specifically, "to tell his father that he was in love with Miss Dale and to ask him to give—"

"Oh!"

Old Cap'n Barry came racking along the winding road from Peggotty Beach in a haste inspired by uncontrollable excitement.

"It's coming back!" he yelled at the snowy white figures on the lawn at Stepping Stones.

"What?" Cicely asked.

"The *Pyramid*," he bellowed. "I'm agoing over now to tell the constable."

Cicely had arisen, with a rush of color to her cheeks; instantly it receded, leaving her marble white. In her throat was a curious tightness.

"Why," she demanded with an effort, "are you going to tell the constable?"

"Going to arrest him, by gravy!" The old Cap'n exploded it directly under Cicely's nose. "They say he killed a feller down to New York, and stole a lot o' diamens and things. Regular thief, you know. And," the Cap'n continued shrewdly, "I don't know whether you heerd it or not, but ole man Bates up at the Center's been missing a lot o' chickens lately, too!"

Cap'n Barry went racking on across the

causeway toward the village, his hurrying heels kicking up little spurts of dust behind him. Motionless, Cicely stared after the aged sailor man until he had crossed the bridge spanning the backwater, then turned to her mother.

"I'm going to warn Mr. Colquhoun," she said.

"Why?" questioned Mrs. Quain. "If he is a thief and a murderer!"

"I don't believe it," Cicely declared. "It's only fair to warn him after—after—He saved my life, you know. I can't stand by and see him—arrested!" The word came hollowly.

In that instant Mrs. Quain understood. Hopelessly perplexed, she glanced toward the beach. There, coming along the road toward them, was Bruce Colquhoun in person. He turned in the drive and came straight across the lawn. With fingers locked tightly together behind her back, Cicely faced him.

"Cap'n Barry," she said tensely, "has gone for the constable to arrest you."

"Thanks," he said simply. There was no other greeting, no extraneous matutinal wishes, no trite comments on the weather. He addressed Mrs. Quain: "I am aware

that I owe you and your daughter some apologies. My sudden departure the other night after I had put the engine of the *Maid-of-the-Sea* out of commission must have seemed curious to you, almost a confession of those charges against me. It was absolutely necessary that I should go, and equally necessary that no one should follow me. I can't explain why. My return, I hope, will convince you that my running away was through no sense of guilt. I can hardly expect you to believe me; I can only hope that you will."

He was searching the faces of the two women—mother and daughter—with his eyes. Mrs. Quain's countenance was blank, inscrutable, tranquil; but deep in the mother's heart a tumult was raging, masked by the conventions. Cicely's hands were brought forward suddenly, and her fingers were locked together. She still wore the ring! "Who-soever hath that ring shall love me forever, and be beloved of me!"

Mrs. Quain spoke:

"I appreciate your motives, Mr. Colquhoun. Already I have thanked you for saving my daughter's life—and I am free to say that personally I have no doubt as to your

innocence. On the other hand, you will understand that it is only fair to us and fair to yourself that we should know who and what you are. I recall distinctly that you have frankly stated that these charges stood against you, but I don't recall that there has been the slightest effort on your part to explain them away, or even to allow us to understand who you are. You are here merely as Mr. Bruce Colquhoun. I don't even know that that is your name."

"It is not," Bruce told her.

"Then what is your name?"

"That I can't tell you,"

"Who are you?"

"That I can't tell you."

"Where are you from? What do you do?"

"Nor can I answer those questions."

"Why not?"

"I can't even answer that."

Mrs. Quain made a little deprecatory motion with her slim hands.

"You yourself compel me to say that, in view of all these things, I must, out of deference to the conventions, ask you to—ask you—"

"I understand perfectly." He bowed slightly, without a change in his countenance.

"It has been inconsiderate of me to expect you to continue your—your friendship, if I may use the word. The withdrawal of your confidence is my greatest regret." His eyes dropped to Cicely's hands; the curious little ring he had given her flashed in the sun. "May I, before you dismiss me, have a few words with your daughter?"

"In my presence, yes," was the reply.

There was no embarrassment, no hesitation in Bruce's manner as he turned flatly to face Cicely, still deathly white.

"Captain Barry and the constable are coming across the causeway," she said dully.

"I'm here," he replied, without so much as a glance around. "I'm here, if they want me." He seemed to dismiss the matter. "I returned to Satuit," he went on, "for several reasons. One of those reasons was to try and make you and your mother understand that I did not run away through fear of arrest; another was that I thought, just having left here, I would be safer here than anywhere else against certain menacing conditions which constantly surround me, my idea being that men who had seen me flee the place would not expect me to return.

My third reason—" He paused, and again glanced down at the ring.

"Your third reason?" Cicely echoed faintly.

"My third reason was to see if you still wore the little ring I gave you aboard the *Pyramid*," he said frankly. "I see that you do, and I thank you for it." Their eyes met understandingly; it was a reference to the note he had written her. She understood. "Your mother has been good enough to express her confidence in me, and she has made me see that her attitude is necessary as a concession to the conventions. So long as you wear that ring I shall understand that you, too, have faith in me. When you return it, I shall know that the charm is broken, that your faith is dead."

Through the haze of her emotions Cicely remembered vaguely that she had promised herself to snub this presumptuous young person soundly for that note; but now she lacked the courage to do it. Some savage thing was tearing at her heart; she wanted to scream. Already she could hear the thump of footsteps on the bridge a couple of hundred yards away as the constable and old Cap'n Barry came toward them!

"There can be no reason sufficiently strong to compel a man of honor to silence regarding his identity," Cicely declared. Her voice was oddly cold, unemotional. "I can continue to have faith in you only when you clear up this mystery which surrounds you."

"I have told you that my life depends upon my ability to keep my identity secret," Bruce pointed out.

"I am not a child, Mr. Colquhoun!" The blue, blue eyes flamed in sudden anger.

"I am under a sentence of death," he pursued, heedless of the scorn in her voice. "I left here the other night as I did because my executioners were at hand. They are seeking me elsewhere now, I hope. I came back to try to make you understand."

"You love the theatric, don't you?" she taunted. "It is a most effective pose!"

She stopped and drew the ring he had given her from her finger. "Whosoever hath this ring shall love me forever and be beloved of me!" It lay in her outstretched palm.

"Your faith is dead, then?" he asked.

"You yourself said what the return of the ring would mean to you."

"I'm sorry."

Old Cap'n Barry and the constable were

at the entrance to the driveway now. Bruce took the ring from her hand, stared at it a moment, then flipped it into the underbrush directly across the winding road. Cicely gasped a little in impotent anger.

With inscrutable face Bruce turned away from her to find that the town constable, smoking furiously, was almost behind him. One hand rested threateningly upon the official hip nearest the official weapon of defense; the official face was pale, despite the hurried walk across the causeway; and there was a vast indetermination in the official eyes.

"Now, don't you start nothing!" Bruce was warned. "I see you're back?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"You ran away from here t'other night in your boat."

"Well?" There was a steely glitter in Bruce's eyes.

"They say you killed a feller down to New York, and stole a lot o' things!" The constable was uneasy beneath the placid glare.

"And old man Bates up at the Center has missed a lot of chickens, too!" piped old Cap'n Barry.

"If you're going to arrest me, do it,"

Bruce advised, curtly. "Show me your warrant and take me along."

The constable wriggled a little, and swung from foot to foot.

"I don't calc'late to arrest you, exactly," he confessed. "I—I just wanted to see if you was back, and tell you I've got my eye on you. I'm going right up to the station and telegraph to Mr. Meredith of New York that—"

"You may save yourself the trouble," Bruce interrupted abruptly. "I telegraphed Mr. Meredith from Boston last night that I would be here to-day."

"You *did*?" incredulously.

"I'll be dinged!" So Cap'n Barry.

"Now, if you've finished," Bruce went on, "please apologize to Mrs. Quain and her daughter here for intruding and making a scene, and go on about your business."

'Twas a crestfallen town official who went stumbling across the lawn and down the driveway. Old Cap'n Barry followed him to the corner, then sat down on the fence to await developments. Be dinged if *he* could understand city folks!

"Why," Cicely asked, curiously, "why are men afraid to arrest you?"

"Because," Bruce replied, tersely, "they're not so certain as you are that I am a thief and a murderer!"

Through all of it Mrs. Quain had been silent. She was remembering that face she had seen through the porthole of the *Pyramid*. She started to ask a question, but changed her mind. Bruce bowed ceremoniously.

"I regret more than I can make you understand," he said, "that things are as they are." He laid a hand upon Cicely's arm and drew her unresisting a few steps to one side. "Some day you'll understand," he said. "Do you see that thin spindle against the sky, far off there to the north?"

"Yes," she replied wonderingly.

"Do you know what it is?"

"A lighthouse, isn't it?"

"Minot's Ledge lighthouse," he explained. "Do you know what the folks about here call that light? They have a name of their own for it."

She shook her head, and her eyes were raised questioningly to his.

"Ask some one," he said. "I wanted you to understand. Good-by."

Again he bowed ceremoniously, first to Mrs. Quain, then to Cicely, and withdrew.

For an hour or more old Cap'n Barry sat on the fence, staring at the house with an imminent expectation on his face. He was just about to give it up when Cicely came down the drive.

"That's Minot's Ledge lighthouse over there, isn't it?" she asked, as she indicated the spindle.

"Yessum."

"It has—has another name, too, hasn't it?" she asked. "I mean the folks about here call it something else, don't they?"

"Yessum," obliged the Cap'n. "They call it the 'I-love-you' light!"

"I love you!"

Cicely's face went scarlet, then white again.

Cap'n Barry stared at her blankly. Battered if *he* could understand 'em!

CHAPTER XIII

THREE telegrams, all forwarded by wire from police headquarters in New York, reached Detective Meredith at intervals of half an hour in the small seacoast town in Maine whither he had gone, following up the elusive trail of the *Pyramid*. The first to arrive was dated the day before, and said tersely:

"I am returning to Satuit to-morrow.

"BRUCE COLQUHOUN."

'Twas amazing, unheard of, unethical even. Here was a game of hare and hounds where the hare, not content with playing his end of the game, must constitute himself as friend, adviser, and guide of the hounds. For no obvious reason, Detective Meredith was seized upon by consuming anger, and there was something vindictive in the way he packed his suit case.

He was just locking it when the second telegram came:

"Motor boat *Pyramid*, Colquhoun aboard, arrived here this morning.

"VON DERP."

Close upon this came the third:

"Bruce Colkoon is back. Hurry up if you want to see him. I got my eye on him. Bring a warrant. Is there any reward?"

"STEVE RICKETTS,
"Town Constable."

Meredith caught the first train for Boston, where, at his telegraphed request, two men from the Bureau of Criminal Investigation met him at the station. And they had a story to tell.

On the preceding night there had been another big jewel robbery, this time in one of the Newtons. The home of a former governor of the state had been ransacked, and a small fortune in jewels had been taken away—about eighty-five thousand dollars worth—among other pieces being a pearl necklace valued alone at forty thousand dollars. Here, too, had been found a mocking little note:

"This closes my work in this vicinity. I wish to thank the Police Department, and Mr. Meredith of New York, for their stupidity.

"THE HAWK."

"This robbery was precisely like the others, save in one particular," one of the Boston detectives informed Meredith. "Up to this

time we have been working in the dark; now we have a clue. A footman in the house heard a noise about two o'clock, and quietly went to investigate, taking a revolver with him. He stopped at the door of a room where the noise seemed to be, and fired three shots into it, in the dark. Somebody ran away. He thinks only one man, but is not at all certain, so there may have been two. Anyway, when the lights were turned on, and an investigation made, this was found."

He produced a photograph from his pocket and handed it to Meredith. It was an enlarged picture of a thumbprint, remarkably clear as to detail, and possessed of marked individual characteristics. Meredith's eyes opened wide as he stared at it.

"It's certain that one of the shots took effect," the Boston detective went on. "This thumbprint was found, outlined in blood, on the edge of a sheet of paper that lay on the desk. The original is at headquarters. Also, it is certain that if The Hawk was alone it was *he who was wounded*, probably only slightly, however, as he was able to get away. If there were two men, of course it might have been the other man who was wounded—this may even be *his* thumbprint, and not

The Hawk's. But at least we have the thumbprint, and it furnishes a clue that *can't be disputed.*" He was silent a moment. "To my mind, it seems that the search has narrowed down to an individual whose thumbprint corresponds with this, and who is probably slightly wounded."

The reasoning seemed clear and lucid enough, but Meredith didn't comment upon it.

"I think," he said slowly, after a little, "that I know the man. That's why I telegraphed you. I have a warrant; I want you to serve it." The heavy jaw of the detective closed with a snap. "And," he added grimly, "there won't be any difference of opinion among the experts. I am an expert myself in this Bertillon thing."

Von Derp, in his lean, gray motor car, met them at the little station in Satuit, and Meredith introduced him to the Boston men.

"Please be good enough to inform them who I am," von Derp requested, "because I should like to ask you, and perhaps ask them, a few questions."

"Mr. von Derp is of the Imperial Secret Service of Germany," Meredith obliged. "He, too, is at work on this case."

There was something awe-inspiring to the Massachusetts sleuths in Meredith's casual manner, in the words themselves. Suddenly they knew that an abyss separated them from this slender, good-looking, immaculate, yellow-bearded, lemon-haired young man. They were plain-clothes men; he was of the Imperial Secret Service of Germany—a detective, it was true, but more than that! They admired the mathematical precision with which von Derp steered his car through the tangle of vehicles into the open roadway.

"You've come to take Colquhoun?" von Derp asked of Meredith, who sat beside him.

"We have!" Meredith was unanimous on that point.

"He went into Boston on the last train," von Derp went on to explain. "However, I have no doubt he'll be back to-night. The *Pyramid* is still in the Cove."

"It's just as well," Meredith commented. "I want to take a look over the *Pyramid*. I believe you said there was a photograph of—?"

"The Countess of Salisbury's garter in the drawer of a table in the cabin," von Derp interrupted. "At least it *was* there." He was thoughtfully silent for a moment. "Just

what is this garter affair, anyway?" he asked. "I'm afraid I don't quite understand it?"

"Simple enough, that part of it," Meredith explained. "I myself don't know the history of the garter particularly, but I do know it was in the British Museum for many years, and was stolen a few months ago. Scotland Yard secretly traced it to America where, presumably, it passed into the hands of an American millionaire, as various stolen paintings and other artistic valuables have done. Dexter of Scotland Yard was sent over here to find the particular millionaire who has it, with the intention of prosecuting him as an example to other millionaires who have bought, and still hold, articles of the sort that they know to have been stolen. Old Daddy Heinz, who was murdered the other day in New York, presumably by The Hawk, seems to have conducted a sort of clearing house for stuff of this sort. It was there we found a trace of The Hawk, after we had thought him dead; in my own mind, I connected him with the theft of Helen Hamilton's jewels, and possibly of complicity in the disappearance of the garter. For that reason Dexter came here with me. He is

now convinced, however, that Colquhoun is not The Hawk, and has gone back to New York to start all over."

Von Derp listened attentively, and at the end he nodded understandingly, and smiled.

"But you want The Hawk for his other—other irregularities?" he questioned.

"I do," Meredith nodded grimly. "I have been afraid to make a mistake and take Colquhoun. Now I am not. I'll lock him up, and establish his identity at leisure. He's too slippery to leave around loose—far too clever to take chances with. This search has gone on for years. I'd rather put my hands on him now than to have five years added to my life!"

The car whisked into the causeway leading to Second Cliff, and von Derp glanced around curiously into the set face of the detective.

"It seems to be something of a personal matter with you?" he remarked, casually.

"It is a personal matter with me," Meredith admitted. "He's made a monkey of me! Believe me, he won't do it again!"

"Are you sure?" von Derp questioned, with a slight smile. "You yourself say he is a clever man!"

"He won't do it again!"

The motor car swung past the entrance to Stepping Stones, around to the right and along the winding road to Peggotty Beach. Cicely, from her window, saw it, and there was a hideous tightening of her heartstrings as she recognized Meredith! She knew now what would come! Meredith and his men alighted.

"Come along," he said to von Derp. "You may find something to interest you."

Old Cap'n Barry peered around the corner of a moss shanty where he was basking in the sun, then arose and approached Meredith's party. They were just stepping into a dory when he came up.

"Ain't nobody on the *Pyramid*," he volunteered.

"We know it," said Meredith, brusquely.

"The feller went into town. Couple o' men here about an hour ago asking for him—two Dago-looking chaps."

"Who were they?" There was quick interest in Meredith's manner.

"Dunno. Never seed 'em before. They rowed out to the la'nch, and one of 'em went aboard and stayed about fifteen minutes, then they both came ashore and went away. I told 'em the feller'd be back at midnight, but they didn't wait."

There was an expression of bewilderment on Meredith's face. He questioned von Derp with his eyes; and von Derp shook his head. Had Colquhoun escaped, after all? Again the detective turned to Cap'n Barry.

"Did the two men take anything off the *Pyramid*?" he questioned.

"Not that I seed."

"What did they look like?"

"Oh," and the old man fished around in his mind, "they looked like a couple o' dagos all dolled up, like this feller," and he indicated von Derp. "I mean, they looked sorter furrin, like he does."

The *Pyramid* lay, perhaps, a hundred yards out. In sheer impatience Meredith himself took an oar, and the dory in which the four men sat shot forward. Once it had been made fast to the *Pyramid*, Meredith scrambled on deck, and the other three men followed him.

In this new search there was none of the exquisite care which had characterized the search von Derp had made. Three pairs of hands, less gifted than his own, pulled and hauled and tumbled and tousled the interior of the cabin regardless; but the search was no less thorough. Those things which von Derp had been so careful to replace precisely

as he had found them went helter-skelter now the while von Derp himself stood looking on, idly smoking.

At last came a moment when every locker, every drawer, every cupboard stood wide open, and the reward had been—nothing! Even the photograph of the Countess of Salisbury's garter was gone now. Silently the three detectives stared at each other. One of the Boston men, Curtis by name, seemed to listen for an instant, then he turned in his tracks, and his eyes swept the cabin, top and bottom, fore and aft.

"Don't you hear a clock ticking?" he asked, curiously. "Hanged if I see one!"

As if moved by one will the three other men scanned the cabin as he had done. Certainly there was no clock in sight, and certainly the search had revealed none. All listened tensely for an instant.

"I don't hear anything," remarked von Derp, "except the ripple of the water against the side of the boat."

"It isn't a clock we want, anyway," Meredith said abruptly. "I wanted any one thing in the world to connect Colquhoun with The Hawk—and I haven't found it."

Still Curtis stood listening tensely. Hang

it, it was a clock! He knew a clock-tick when he heard it! It was of no consequence; it merely annoyed him. Then suddenly it occurred to him that it might be a clock up beside the steering wheel outside, and he vanished through the companionway.

An instant later came a little cry from the cabin—a guttural exclamation of satisfaction—and he ran in. Meredith had drawn the photograph of the thumbprint from his pocket, and was showing it to von Derp.

"That thumbprint was left by The Hawk last night in the Newton robbery," he was explaining, excitedly. "We have here on the white woodwork of the *Pyramid* that identical thumbprint. Examine it yourself!"

Von Derp did examine it with a curious surprised expression on his face. For a long time he scrutinized it, comparing every line of it with the photograph. When he spoke there was an air of finality, almost triumph, in his manner.

"I congratulate you, gentlemen," he said in that odd, precise little manner of his. "Your problem is solved; identity is proved. The thumbprint in the photograph and this original are identical. It will be necessary, of course, to photograph it. At Stepping

Stones I have a splendid camera. Perhaps, Meredith, one of your men will run up and get it?"

"Now, Mr. Bruce Colquhoun," and Detective Meredith permitted himself to gloat, "now, Mr. Bruce Colquhoun, come to me!"

Half an hour later, after the photograph had been made and the searching party was preparing to leave the boat, Curtis turned for one final squint about the cabin, still with that puzzled, listening expression on his face.

"I'll bet eight dollars," he remarked to the world at large, "that that is a clock ticking!"

Nobody took him up.

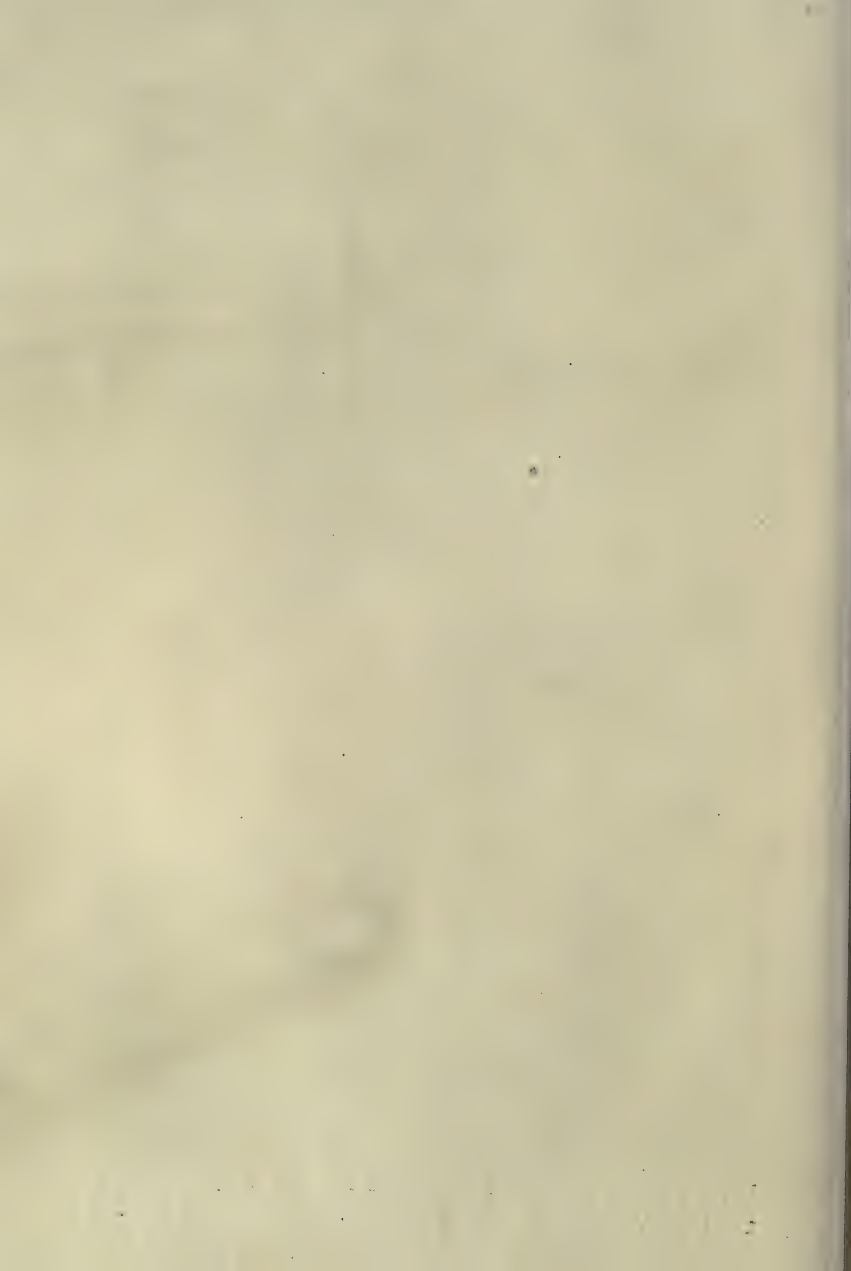
'Twas past midnight, and the full moon, riding high, drenched the world in a silver sheen. Bruce Colquhoun came out of the winding roadway upon the beach; Meredith, von Derp, and the two Boston men, patiently waiting in the shadow of a bathhouse, saw him cross the sandy stretch, slide a dory down to the water, and step into it. Just as he pushed off they broke cover, and came running across the beach toward him.



With a great gushing flame the PYRAMID leaped clear of
the water.

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My Lady's Garter



Colquhoun saw them coming, and rowed rapidly.

Another dory lay near by.

"Put her in the water," Meredith commanded, angrily. "We shouldn't have let him pass us. Hurry up. He's going to run for it."

Already the small boat, with Bruce aboard, was nosing the *Pyramid*, and as Meredith looked he saw his quarry scramble nimbly up her side and vanish down the companionway. An instant later a light in the cabin flashed.

"Hurry!" Meredith shouted. "If he gets away this time—!"

The tide lapped at the bow of the second dory, and she floated with four men crowded aboard. The clock on the little white church in the village boomed one! Meredith, revolver in hand, stood at the bow of the dory, prepared to leap for the *Pyramid* when she came within reach.

And then—then—there before his eyes came a great gushing flame from the placid bosom of the ocean; and with it a thunderous crash under his very nose, and the sea seemed to rise in a mass and envelop him. In one fraction of a second he had seen the *Pyramid*

leap clear of the water and turning, bow down, plunge into it again. The next thing Meredith remembered, he was in icy cold water, swimming. Von Derp was here beside him, and on the far side of the overturned dory were the two Boston men. Gigantic waves flattened out placidly. Where the *Pyramid* had been there was—nothing!

Ten minutes later von Derp and three detectives, chilled to the bone, their teeth chattering, were lined up along Peggotty Beach, staring blankly at the murmuring waters.

"Obviously, it was an explosion of some sort," said von Derp.

"Sounded like dynamite to me," said one of the Boston men.

"Gasoline," remarked Curtis, tersely. "God!" The horror of the thing seemed to strike him all at once. "He didn't have a chance, did he? The Hawk, I mean."

"There," said Detective Meredith solemnly, "there went the cleverest crook of all time!"

It was an epitaph.

Aroused from horrid dreams by a dull, thunderous crash, Cicely Quain arose and

went to the window of her bedroom. Away to the north Minot's Ledge lighthouse shot a guiding message into the void.

"I love you!" Cicely trembled a little as she read it. "I love you!"

Steadily, steadily, the flashes came to her; and again: "I love you!"

PART IV

WHO IS THE HAWK?

CHAPTER I

SUFFERING strikes from the spirit of youth that splendid assurance which makes of youth the charming thing it is. It was so in the case of Cicely Quain, or Helen Hamilton as she became again now that the avalanche of publicity had run its course, and she was back in New York. The chastening rod of experience had brought a pathetic little droop to the rebellious mouth, had softened the defiant fire in the blue, blue eyes; and the ruddy glow of her cheeks had paled to a tender peach-blush. All this, merely the reflection of some great change wrought within, had etherealized her, transfigured her, made her into that sweetest of God's creatures—a woman! The shackles which had bound her to willfulness were severed; there had come even a trace of humility into her manner, and surely here *was* a miracle!

Mercifully the newspaper accounts of the destruction of the *Pyramid* had been brief,

and inaccurate, and inadequate. They recited baldly that Bruce Colquhoun, who was wanted by the police for burglary, had been killed by an explosion aboard a motor boat, whither he had fled to escape arrest, and had gone down in the wreck of the boat. Either the explosion had been due to an accident, or he had purposely blown up the *Pyramid* with the gasoline aboard to avoid a long term in prison. There had been no effort to raise the boat, and would be none; therefore Colquhoun's body had not been recovered.

This was the outward aspect of the affair. Helen knew how false it was, knew it deep in her aching heart. But what was the truth? Bruce Colquhoun had feared some threatening unknown thing, she knew—he had told her so, but in riddles, and she had taunted him for his confidence. "I am under sentence of death," he had said in explanation of his spectacular escape from the watchful police. "My executioners were at hand!" And they had found him at last! But who were his executioners? Why had his death been necessary? Why had he been unable to explain?

The inadequate newspaper dispatches had contained no reference to the curious mystery

which had enveloped this masterful, compelling, arrogant young man—there had not been even a hint to the world that he was supposed to be The Hawk, and Helen was grateful for it. All at once she knew she never had *believed* that he was The Hawk! She had faith in him, now that he was dead; he had bought back her faith with his life! And more than her faith—her love! She didn't deny it even to herself!

Von Derp had quietly told Mrs. Hamilton what had happened—how Colquhoun, trapped in the cabin of the *Pyramid*, must have been instantly killed by the explosion which sent the boat to the bottom, and the mother had deemed it best to tell the story to Helen. The girl had shed no tears, in spite of the sudden agony which overwhelmed her; there had been little to show her emotion beyond the swift blanching of her cheeks. She had doubted him! And he had tried to make her understand. She *did* understand now that it was too late—too late!

Born of the dumb grief which threatened to crush her came the thought that she must make some reparation to—to his memory. The ring he had given her! "Whosoever hath that ring shall love me forever." She

would find it and wear it again! That last day, when she returned it to him, he had tossed it into a little jungle of wild roses and elder bushes and tangled vines; and she searched there for hours. Success rewarded her efforts at last; she appeared before her mother with hands torn and bleeding.

"Why, my dear!" Mrs. Hamilton had exclaimed. "Whatever is the matter with your—?"

"He would have liked for me to wear his ring," Helen had said, simply. "I shall wear it, as a token of my faith in him."

That had been all; Mrs. Hamilton merely stared. And within the week, at Helen's insistence, Stepping Stones had been closed, and the Hamiltons had returned to New York. There, her father, harassed almost unto madness by his first losing fight in the great financial game, heaped reproach upon her. She bore it calmly.

"John Gaunt is ruining me," he stormed. "It was in your power to stop him, and you have refused. He is fond of that only son of his in spite of all his bluster; and if there had been a marriage between you—if his son had become my son-in-law—family considerations would have made him let up on

me." He was silent a moment. "It may not be too late now?"

"You mean if I should marry Skeets?" Helen questioned.

"Yes," eagerly.

"But he won't marry me."

"Why not?"

"He doesn't love me."

"Bah!"

"And I don't love him."

"Love!" The railroad magnate was sneering. "Are we a lot of children to be prating always of love when my—my future—your future—your mother's future—may depend absolutely upon you? What does it matter if he doesn't love you, and you don't love him? Love! Is that all there is in the world?"

"Love!" Helen breathed the word softly. "Yes," she said, "that's all there is in the world!"

That ended the interview. Brokaw Hamilton went back to his fight, raging. He felt that he had been betrayed, and by his own daughter. Now was no time for her sentimental whims! There were millions at stake!

It may have been intuitive consideration,

or it may have been some hidden motive which had prevented von Derp from mentioning Bruce Colquhoun, even indirectly, to Helen in those days of her tense grief. The change in her was obvious, and upon the return of the Hamiltons to New York he had gracefully withdrawn from the household and quartered himself at a downtown hotel. Two or three times she had seen him; and vaguely she was grateful for his failure to hark back to the tragedy.

Came a day, however, when von Derp, immaculate as ever, exquisitely precise in his courtesy, had called at the Hamilton mansion in The Bronx, and there in his odd ultra-correct manner had poured out his heart to the girl. He loved her, he had said; he had loved her from the first time he had seen her. Helen felt, as her mother had once felt, the deep sincerity of his profession. For the first time she was conscious of the actual man behind the mask of convention; and she was inclined to be gentle.

"I don't believe," she had said finally, "that I shall ever marry any one."

"In the beginning I understood that you were engaged to Mr. Gaunt," von Derp explained, "therefore I could not speak.

My understanding must have been correct, because when I telegraphed to your father for permission to pay my—my addresses, he assured me that your hand was pledged. But now I know that Mr. Gaunt, whatever his interest in you may have been, is interested elsewhere, and I have hoped that—”

“I don’t believe,” she repeated, “that I shall ever marry any one.”

Von Derp seemed lost in meditation for a moment. Then:

“May I hope that if there comes a change in your—what shall I say?—your viewpoint, that I—?”

“Mr. von Derp,” Helen interrupted, “how well did you know Mr. Colquhoun?”

The young man lifted his pale yellow brows and opened his brown eyes wide.

“How well did I know him?” he repeated. “As well as you did, perhaps, but—”

“You, my mother, the police—all those who know most of this—this strange affair—have taken it for granted, since Mr. Colquhoun’s death, that he was The Hawk. I am right in assuming that you believe it even now, am I not?”

“I can hardly believe otherwise,” von Derp

confessed, with a deprecatory gesture of his hands. "I doubt if you understand—"

"After all," Helen ran on again, "I knew Mr. Colquhoun better than any one else, I think. I know, for instance, that he had never a fear of the police, as people seem to think he had; I know that his fear was of something mysterious, some menacing, threatening thing that had nothing to do with the police. It was fear of that—that Thing that made it necessary for him to conceal his identity. But he only feared death! He is dead now—dead, and in death forever identified with a notorious criminal. To an extent he confided in me, believed in me. To me it seems a duty to clear his name of the shame which rests upon it. That can be done by establishing *his true identity*; a clever man can do that. Can you?"

For a minute perhaps von Derp stared at her. She was sitting with her slim hands clasped tightly between her knees, gazing into nothingness.

"Nothing was further from my intention than to precipitate a discussion of—" von Derp began, apologetically.

"I know, I know deep in my heart, that Bruce Colquhoun and The Hawk were not

the same," Helen continued slowly, "and a clever man can prove it. By proving it he can dissipate the ignominy which enshrouds Bruce Colquhoun. Can you do it? Will you do it—for me?" She waited. "You say you love me. Do you love me well enough to clear another man—a dead man—of the hideous charges that stand against him?"

Von Derp arose suddenly, the serenity of his face disturbed by some powerful emotion within.

"I do," he declared abruptly, violently. "I love you well enough to do anything in this world for you—anything!" Helen glanced up, a little astonished at his vehemence; his gaze was burning into her own. "And if I *do* clear Bruce Colquhoun's memory of the shame that rests upon it—if I do?"

"I shall be grateful," Helen said simply.

"I shall demand more than gratitude," von Derp warned her. "If it is possible for the thing to be done I will do it. And then when I have done it?" He was questioning her with his eyes. "I could make you very happy. May I, then, ask you if—may I ask you the question I have just asked?"

There was almost a promise in Helen's clear blue eyes as she raised them to his.

"When the thing is done," she said slowly, "I shall not forget the debt I owe."

"But," and von Derp's shapely hands were writhing, "that is not sufficient. If I clear Bruce Colquhoun's name of—"

"Come back when you have done it."

Motionless, von Derp stood for a long time with his gaze fixed upon her eagerly, tensely. There was something curiously diaphanous, effulgent even, in the way the light struck her hair. Bending, he pressed his lips to her marble-cold hand, and an instant later he was gone.

CHAPTER II

THERE was an inquiring uplift of Brokaw Hamilton's brows as the door of his study opened and August von Derp entered. The railroad magnate looked him over critically, curiously; he didn't recall that he had ever seen an individual more perfectly groomed. The lemon-colored hair had just enough wave in it, the yellow beard was of just the proper length and was pointed mathematically; even the dinner dress von Derp wore looked as if it had been fitted to him by geometrical rules.

"May I have ten minutes—five minutes?" he asked.

"Certainly," the millionaire assented. "Sit down."

"Thanks. And you don't mind if I smoke?"

"Not at all."

Brokaw Hamilton settled back in his chair, and watched von Derp select and light a cigarette. At last:

"You will remember, Mr. Hamilton," the young man began without further preliminary, "that a short time since I telegraphed you from Satuit, asking your permission to

pay my addresses to your daughter? You will also remember that you answered my telegram with the statement that your daughter's hand was pledged to another?"

"I remember, yes."

"That was true at that time but it is not true to-day," von Derp continued precisely. "Mr. Gaunt—I am speaking with his permission—is about to announce his engagement to a Miss Dale of Satuit. I hope, this being the case, that I may repeat my request with the assurance that your answer this time will be more favorable?"

So there had been a rupture of some sort between Helen and Skeets! In this Brokaw Hamilton discovered the mystery behind Helen's refusal to marry Skeets even—even to stop John Gaunt's merciless warfare upon himself; even to hold the Hamilton millions intact. He nodded grimly.

"I will say, too," von Derp added, "that your daughter has intimated that, under certain conditions, my attentions to her would not be distasteful."

"Those conditions being?"

"I am not at liberty to state them," von Derp replied courteously. "She is not, of course, unaware of my devotion to her."

For a long time the railroad magnate pondered it with clouded brow, oblivious of the young man who was waiting patiently for his answer. The longer he considered the situation the less chance von Derp had for the answer he wanted. After all, there had merely been some silly quarrel between Skeets and Helen; and lovers' quarrels are easily adjusted. Immediate adjustment of this particular quarrel might mean a match between Skeets and Helen after all; and that would mean— Brokaw Hamilton smiled, confidently.

"Even under the conditions you state," he said slowly, "I will have to disappoint you." Came a sudden, steely glitter into his eyes. "I hope you won't ask for my reasons, because I would be compelled to refuse them."

There was a shade of chagrin in von Derp's hitherto placid face. He flipped the ashes from his cigarette, then arose abruptly. When he spoke, however, his voice was still casual, precise, unemotional.

"You won't mind if I lock the door?" he questioned, as he turned the key.

The click of the lock startled Brokaw Hamilton—he couldn't have explained why.

He straightened up in his chair, vaguely conscious of a menace in the velvety calm of the other.

"Why is it necessary to lock the door?" he demanded, curtly.

"Because," von Derp answered, "I may say some things that you—*you*—would not like to have overheard."

"But there's nothing further to be said about—"

"Pardon me, there is much to be said." Von Derp returned to his chair. "Your daughter has placed me under an obligation to—to do a certain thing. Before I proceed it is necessary that you and I have a complete understanding. You have played a prominent part in the—"

"The interview is ended." Brokaw Hamilton arose angrily. "There is nothing further to be said."

Von Derp leaned back in his chair, calmly insolent.

"I dare say, Mr. Hamilton," he remarked, "that you have never discovered that the letter of introduction I brought you from a business associate of yours in Amsterdam—one Wilhelm von Derp—was a forgery?"

"A forgery?" It came explosively, incredulously.

"A forgery," von Derp repeated. "I am not Wilhelm von Derp's son—as a matter of fact, I don't know if he has a son. And von Derp is not my name."

After one inarticulate burst of astonishment, the railroad magnate stood motionless, glaring down at his caller.

"I didn't imagine you would take the trouble to make inquiries about me," von Derp went on evenly, "and I was correct in my surmise. It is a common American fault. It remained for me to confess that I am—"

"An impostor!" exclaimed Mr. Hamilton.

"That is the word, yes, an impostor," the young man agreed calmly. "If you'll sit down a moment—"

"An impostor!" The millionaire repeated the phrase violently. "An impostor and a forger!"

"Right," said von Derp. "If you'll sit down—"

"If you're not von Derp's son, then who are you?"

"We are coming to that. Please sit down."

Brokaw Hamilton strode the length of the

study twice; von Derp, still smoking, watched him imperturbably, with a little cynical uplift of his lips.

"I'll expose you, of course," Mr. Hamilton declared hotly. "Impositions of that sort and forgery are crimes in—"

"And you will *not* expose me."

"Why not?"

"Oh, there are several reasons, the first being that you would bring another flood of obnoxious publicity about you and your family, and they would have to run away from it again, and—"

"Bah! That feature would have the least consideration of—"

"Well, then, there are other reasons why you won't expose me, as you express it," von Derp mocked. "For instance, I," his whole manner changed; the polish sloughed off, "I am one of the two men living who know that *you* are the American millionaire now being sought by Scotland Yard in connection with the theft of the Countess of Salisbury's garter from the British Museum; and, further, I am the *only* man living who knows that old Daddy Heinz was your agent in that theft, and therefore, since the police were hot after you, it was to your advantage

to get rid of him; and I am the only man living who knows that *you were the last person with him on the night he was murdered!* Still further, I am the only man living who knows that *you have in your possession at this moment a certain diamond which was taken out of the garter!*" He stopped. "Now, will you sit down?"

Stricken mute, with some hideous growing terror deep in his eyes, the millionaire listened to the end, then went reeling away from von Derp as if from a blow. The young man smiled unpleasantly as his host dropped back weakly into the desk chair.

"Not murder, no," Brokaw Hamilton denied hoarsely. "I didn't kill him!"

"I can prove that you did!"

"'Twas some one else who shot him," the words rushed out almost incoherently from pallid lips, "some one who came in unexpectedly. I was in a back room, waiting—"

"So you *were there* that night!" There was triumphant emphasis in von Derp's tone. "I thought I could not have been mistaken."

In the grip of a ghastly fear that left him dead white the railroad magnate staggered to his feet and leaned wearily against a window

sill, fighting for a self-possession that had never before deserted him. The young man, placidly smoking, waited for him to speak.

"I—I—if you accuse me,"—the words came falteringly at last,—“I shall tell the truth! I am innocent!”

"I have no intention of accusing you," von Derp assured him with a languid gesture. "I am merely trying to make you understand why my claims to the hand of your daughter are not to be summarily dismissed. Also, it will seem very curious for you to tell *the truth*, as you express it, at this late date."

For the first time in his life Brokaw Hamilton had come face to face with terror. He shook as with an ague; panic was upon him. The imperturbability of his accuser crushed the last ounce of resistance out of nerves already racked by the financial conflict with John Gaunt. Came now no denial—remained only curiosity.

"In the name of God, who are you?" Brokaw Hamilton now demanded hollowly. "*What* are you? How do you know these things? How did you learn them?"

"Who am I?" von Derp mused. "The name you know me by is sufficient. What am I? I have the honor to be a special agent

of the Imperial Secret Service of Germany. How have I learned all this? It is my business to know things."

"Germany?" in bewilderment. "I thought England—Scotland Yard men—"

"My knowledge of your affairs—of the affair of the Countess of Salisbury's garter—is purely accidental," von Derp explained, pleasantly. "Originally I came to this country to search for certain of the crown jewels of Germany which disappeared a few months ago. In my investigations I stumbled upon the fact that you were implicated in the garter affair—it was a treasure to add to your art collection. It occurred to me that a man who would be interested in that affair might be interested in other art treasures—specifically, those jewels which belong to the German crown. So my interest in you was aroused; I found it necessary to reach you socially, to be close to you—so I forged the letter of introduction from a man whom, I learned, was a business associate of yours in Amsterdam. You know the remainder of that."

"Then, as I understand it, you have no direct interest in—" A gleam of hope lighted the millionaire's pallid face.

"The garter?" von Derp finished. "Not

the slightest. It merely happens that I discovered your—your complicity in that affair, and now that Daddy Heinz is dead I am the only man living, except your attorney, who is aware of it. I may add that I know the jewels I seek are not in your possession and never have been."

"Nor is the garter in my possession, now," the millionaire supplemented.

"I know that, too."

"Perhaps you know who has it?"

"And I know that. The garter is now in the possession of a notorious criminal known as The Hawk."

Fell a long silence. Von Derp lighted another cigarette and amused himself by blowing precise little ringlets of smoke into the air. Slowly the color came again to Brokaw Hamilton's face, and with it some of that self-possession which had deserted him utterly at the first mention of those things which he had imagined unknown to any man save himself.

"Knowing all that you do,"—fear was still tugging at his heart,—"what do you intend doing?"

"I?" Von Derp seemed a little surprised. "Nothing. These things are none of my

affair. I mentioned them only to convince you that it would not be wise to expose me, as you express it, because my incognito is necessary; also to impress upon you the desirability of giving due consideration to my request for permission to pay my addresses to your daughter. I come of one of the best families of Germany, a family of position and wealth equal to your own. I am in the Imperial Secret Service because it amuses me—that's all."

"I am to understand then that you are threatening me? You demand my daughter's hand as the price of your silence?"

"That is just as you look at it," was the reply. "I hope before you give me a definite answer that you will bear in mind the fact that *I can prove that you killed Daddy Heinz!*"

"There you involve moral obligations. If you can prove that, why don't you deliver me over to the police?" There was no answer. "What is the moral attitude of a man who knows that another is guilty of murder and refuses to surrender him in consideration of a price—in this case, my daughter's hand?"

"It is not unlike the moral attitude of a man who, possessed of enormous wealth,

connives at the theft of an art treasure he is unable to buy—connives at the theft and conspires to conceal it.”

Brokaw Hamilton had never thought of it in just that way; the freshness of the viewpoint startled him a little.

“I am innocent of the murder of Daddy Heinz—you should know I am incapable of it.” There was a deadly calm in the railroad magnate’s manner now. “Just how would you proceed to convict an innocent man of such a crime?”

“Let’s go back a bit,” suggested von Derp, obligingly, and his shallow eyes narrowed slightly. “Let’s go back to the night young Mr. Gaunt was arrested. Some hours preceding that you had been informed that Scotland Yard men were in America looking for that garter, that they suspected it was in possession of some rich American art collector who had actually participated in the theft, else had secretly bought it, *knowing* it to be stolen. Very well. You were either conscience stricken or afraid, so after consultation with your lawyer, Winthrop Power, you planned to return the garter to the police. The scheme was to place the garter in a vacant house where the police would find it with no

clue as to how it got there. That was to end your connection with the affair. You would have made restitution. Am I right so far?"

The millionaire didn't answer; he was fascinated by this clear, concise recital of things that he had imagined were locked safely in his own brain.

"I am right." Von Derp answered his own question. "You and Mr. Power went to that vacant house in his automobile—Number 1234—and placed the garter on the mantel in a ground-floor room. This done, Mr. Power telephoned to the nearest police station to say where the garter would be found. Already Mr. Dexter, of Scotland Yard, had sent out broadcast to the police a description of the garter, so they made a rush for it. Somehow, ridiculously enough, young Mr. Gaunt was entangled, but what I have said covers your actual participation in the garter affair. And now we come to the murder of old Daddy Heinz."

Brokaw Hamilton shuddered a little as von Derp paused and thoughtfully poked his finger through a smoke ring.

"How I learned all this is immaterial," he continued after a moment. "I did learn

it. So when you called at the house in West Thirtieth Street to see Daddy Heinz I was in reach—always, you will bear in mind, with an eye to locating the jewels I am seeking. I was within hearing distance when the three shots that killed the old man were fired; *you were the only other person in that house. You—*"

"There was another man there," Hamilton broke in quickly. "I have explained—"

"Who was he?" von Derp flashed. "Where is he? Can you say, even, what he looked like?"

"I can swear that only one person left that house after the shots were fired," von Derp said slowly, "and that you were that person! I can swear to that because I saw you! So, you see, we have a motive for murder, exclusive opportunity, and now—if further proof is needed—you have in your possession at this moment one of the diamonds out of the garter—a single stone that had found its way back to Daddy Heinz. That's all." He stopped abruptly and arose. Instantly he became again the courteous, mathematically precise individual who had entered the room half an hour before. "I have the honor," he said, "to

ask your permission to pay my addresses to your daughter."

"No!" The single word came violently; again Brokaw Hamilton had gone deathly white.

"Don't be hasty, please. Take time, if you like, and think it over."

"No!"

"Always remembering that *I can prove that you killed Daddy Heinz?*"

"No! That is final."

For half a minute von Derp remained standing, searching the other's face for a sign of weakness.

"Very well," he said at last. He dropped down into his chair and drew the desk telephone toward him. "Give me the nearest police station—quick!"

No man may know the torturing thoughts that swept in a flood through the millionaire's mind; no man may judge his acts, or the motives that prompted those acts.

"Hello!" Von Derp was talking. "Who is this? The police station? Just a moment, please!" He glanced up at Brokaw Hamilton.

"I—I think I *will* take time to—to think it over," the millionaire was saying. His

face was haggard. "A week perhaps? I—I don't know—"

Von Derp nodded; then into the transmitter:

"I beg your pardon," he apologized. "There's a mistake in the number. I'm sorry."

Vaguely Brokaw Hamilton was conscious of a clatter as the receiver was returned to the hook. And then he seemed to be alone! Von Derp, in the drawing room, was laughing lightly at some trivial anecdote Mrs. Hamilton was telling.

CHAPTER III

CAUSE and effect are as widely separated as the poles. Toss a stone into a millpond and the ripples arising therefrom go scudding away to its remotest corners. Tossed into the New York police department, the mystery of my lady's garter sent ripples to the uttermost ends of the earth. The effect as a whole was as incongruous as it was widespread, and as widespread as it was apparently disassociated in its several units from a series of inexplicable incidents which transpired categorically in New York, the center of agitation. Yet each effect could be traced to a common cause.

For instance, in St. Petersburg the effect was a hurried meeting of the Russian cabinet; in Rio Janeiro an Englishman put on false whiskers; in Tokyo an American adopted Japanese dress; in Washington, the British ambassador lost a rubber at bridge; in Berlin, Mynherr, the superintendent of the Imperial Secret Service, received an odd cable dispatch; in Lynndyll, New Jersey, a jail was filled with nihilists; in Boston, a detective's beans grew cold because he was late for dinner; in

London, three Scotland Yard men developed nervous headaches; in Satuit, Steve Ricketts, town constable, cherished grave doubts as to whether or not he would ever get back eighty-five cents he had spent for a telegram. In New York all sorts of things happened.

As I have said, all these things were tangibly, albeit tenuously, connected. The Englishman in Rio Janeiro who put on false whiskers was the individual who had stolen the garter originally from the British Museum, selling it later to Daddy Heinz; the American in Tokyo had been his accomplice in that theft, and he adopted native dress as a disguise; in Washington the British ambassador had been directed by his government to request this government to check newspaper discussion of the garter affair until the millionaire malefactor had been brought to justice, and this unusual request upset him so he lost his rubber; the cable dispatch to Berlin had asked for a minute description of the missing crown jewels, and was signed Meredith; the detective's beans grew cold in Boston because he was comparing two thumbprints; the Scotland Yard men in London developed headaches because of a

stern rebuke from the foreign office for their failure to recover the garter.

There were important consequences as a result of the hurried cabinet meeting in St. Petersburg—first, a wholesale arrest of nihilists—some twoscore men and half a dozen women gathered in from all parts of the Russian empire; and as an echo of that, fourteen nihilists were captured in Lynndyll, New Jersey, by special agents. So the Czar slept in peace because the backbone of the greatest nihilistic machine in the world was broken.

Now we come down to the things that were happening in New York. Chronologically they came after this fashion:

Detective Meredith received a telephone message from a private suite of the Ritz-Carlton. He was informed that the Russian ambassador was desirous of seeing him immediately, so Meredith hurried there. The ambassador in person received him.

"Some few days since, Mr. Meredith," the diplomatist began, "while you were in Satuit you received anonymously by mail from Boston a roughly drawn floor plan of a house with the words—" he consulted his notebook, "—or, I should say, some figures

and one word: '21 Willow 7/3.' That is correct?"

"Yes," Meredith assented in wonder.

"You made some investigation as a result of that, I suppose?"

"I did."

"May I inquire the result of that investigation?" the ambassador pursued. "I will pledge myself to secrecy if you wish."

"It isn't necessary," and the detective shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing worth while happened. There had been several jewel robberies in Boston, all presumably the work of one man—a notorious criminal known as The Hawk. There are several Willow streets in the suburbs of Boston. Number 21 of one of these I found to be the home of a wealthy family; and the 7/3 was obviously a date of some sort. Therefore on the night of July 3, the family having been called away, I took possession of the house, and waited."

"And what—?"

"Nothing. At least, there was no sign of The Hawk. My men stationed outside must have frightened him away, if indeed he had contemplated a robbery there. Incidentally, I made the acquaintance that night of another man who was after The Hawk—

this being Mr. August von Derp of the Imperial Secret Service of Germany. He waited with us until dawn. It seems that some of the crown jewels of Germany have disappeared, and he had reason to believe they were in The Hawk's possession."

The ambassador smoked a vile Russian cigarette down to the very dregs; Meredith lighted a cigar in self-defense.

"You never knew who sent you the plan of the house?" asked the diplomatist.

"Oh, yes. Von Derp sent it."

"Indeed?" in surprise.

"He had no authority to make an arrest, and wanted me on hand if The Hawk should appear."

"I see," and the diplomatist smiled suavely. "That is all, I think. I thank you."

Meredith swallowed a few questions that he would have liked to have answered, for instance: What business had the Russian ambassador in all this? And how did he happen to know so much about it? However, Meredith was growing used to finding questions to which there seemed no answer, so he let it go at that.

The next thing to happen in New York, bearing on the mystery in hand, was the

sudden and complete collapse of Brokaw Hamilton. Old John Gaunt, en route to his office, picked up a morning paper to find that his arch-enemy had gone down under the strain of the great financial fight, and had taken to his bed, desperately ill.

"Oh, hell!" said John Gaunt.

Half a dozen subordinates awaited him; they were smiling, every one. With Brokaw Hamilton ill and out of the game there was nothing now to hinder the immediate accomplishment of John Gaunt's designs on his millions. Already the market was trembling, industrials were panicky; it remained only for the coal baron to go smashing through at will. Under his immediate direction they were to do the smashing.

John Gaunt came into his office like a thunder cloud. The first thing he did was to call up Brokaw Hamilton's home on the telephone.

"How is Mr. Hamilton?" he demanded.

"Very ill," came the reply.

"What's the matter with him?"

"A nervous breakdown, sir. Two physicians remained with him all night."

"Unable to attend to business, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, sir. The physicians say it may be months before—"

"All right, thanks. Tell him Mr. John Gaunt inquired about his condition." He hung up the receiver and turned to his subordinates. "The fight's all off," he declared. "There's no glory in licking a dead man. I got about six millions out of him, anyway. That'll hold me for a spell." He scribbled some orders on a sheet of paper. "Get in the market and stop it," he ordered. "Believe me, when Hamilton gets well again I'll take his watch!"

The third thing to happen was some strange metamorphosis in Helen. One afternoon she dropped in to tea at the St. Regis, alone. There was a drooping sadness about the rosebud mouth, mute anguish in the blue, blue eyes, a settled melancholy in her manner, a pensive note in her voice. She remained there until the limousine came up from downtown with her mother—and here was a new Helen; the Helen of old, rosy cheeked, sparkling, buoyant. There was a spring in her walk, and a laugh on her lips, and a flash of that old defiant fire in the depths of the blue, blue eyes.

Mrs. Hamilton stared at her, amazed.

Miracles of this sort were wrought only by that greatest necromancer of them all—Dan Cupid.

"Heavens!" she soliloquized, "the child falls in and out of love as a duck goes in and out of water." Then aloud: "What is it, my dear?"

In the seclusion of the limousine Helen threw her vigorous young arms around her mother, and squeezed her until she grunted.

"What is the matter?" Mrs. Hamilton was alarmed.

"What do you think?" Helen demanded. "Mr. von Derp asked me to marry him!"

"And," there was resignation in Mrs. Hamilton's manner, "and are you so happy because of that?"

"No," said Helen enigmatically, "I'm happy in spite of it!"

Von Derp was at great concern as a result of the next happening in the series. Ostensibly he called at the Hamilton home to inquire after Mr. Hamilton; and once there he took advantage of the situation to remain to dinner. Helen fairly bubbled; he was charmed. Keen delight alternated swiftly in his face with some subtle thing which seemed to be bewilderment.

"What's the matter?" Helen asked curiously at last. "You look as if you had been sent for and couldn't go?"

"Nothing of consequence," he replied, in that odd little way of his. "I had a sort of shock this afternoon. I was in the grill at the Knickerbocker, when I chanced to look out into the lobby, and saw a man whom," he was leaning forward, with his eyes fixed tensely on hers, "whom I would have sworn was Bruce Colquhoun!"

"Bruce Colquhoun!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamilton.

"You didn't see his face?" Helen asked, quickly.

"No," was the reply. "'Twas only a glimpse. He was hurrying through. By the time I reached the door he was gone. But the impression was so strong that—"

"Nonsense!" Helen reproved him flipantly. "Bruce Colquhoun is dead." She speared an olive with her fork. "You're seeing things."

The heartlessness of the remark was transparent. Mrs. Hamilton opened her beautiful eyes to their widest; von Derp seemed more puzzled than ever. And this was the girl who had pledged him to clear Colquhoun's

name of ignominy! A strange chain of thought ran through his mind.

"I may judge from your tone," he began courteously, and again his shallow eyes were fixed upon her, "that the obligation you placed upon me, then, is of no—no consequence?"

"Not the slightest," Helen assured him, with a dazzling smile. "I wouldn't worry about it. I dare say Bruce Colquhoun *was* The Hawk, after all!"

CHAPTER IV

AND last, came a happening so weird, so fantastic, so bizarre, that Brokaw Hamilton could hardly convince himself that it was a reality. Surely this was the beginning of madness. First was the torturing thought it was just that and nothing else; and out of that grew a keen, childlike interest which kept him waiting tensely for developments, as one does in a fairy story.

In his own room in his own home at dead of night it happened. Pallid, and weak, and nerve-racked he lay, staring with wide eyes into the darkness. His physicians had gone; his nurse in an adjoining room had dropped off to sleep. Without having heard a sound, the financier became suddenly aware of the fact that there was some one else in the room. His nurse, perhaps; she had crept in silent-shod, to see if he was all right.

"Who's there?" he asked.

Instantly he was bathed in light from an electric flash. It dazzled him. He raised his hands to shield his eyes. Simultaneously he discovered that there was a nasty looking

revolver beside the light; it was pointed directly at his breast.

"Now don't call any one, and don't move," came a warning from the pall behind the light. "You may put your hands down."

Obediently the millionaire lowered them.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am The Hawk!"

It was a simple introduction, but an effective one. There was almost a touch of pride in the intruder's tone. Brokaw Hamilton forgot that he was ill, and sat up straight in bed.

"The Hawk!" he repeated.

"Not so loud, please," came the command. "Don't forget that the nurse is asleep in the next room, and we wouldn't care to disturb her."

"What do you want?" Vainly the financier tried to pierce the darkness beyond the glare of the flash.

"I had an impression that you'd be lonely, and I dropped in for a few minutes' conversation," was the cheerful response. "You won't mind if I lock the door into the nurse's room, will you? And the door into the hall? Then you may turn on your night light, and we'll be cozy."

Fascinated, the financier watched his visitor

as he silently turned the keys in the locks.

"Now," said The Hawk, "you may turn on the light beside your bed."

Mr. Hamilton's hand trembled with eagerness as he reached for the button. He was overwhelmed with curiosity to see this man face to face. But he didn't. The Hawk was masked. A black hood was drawn down over his head to his shoulders; a pair of pleasant brown eyes looked out through a narrow slit. He drew up a chair and sat down.

"If you'll just remember now that I have this revolver," he remarked, "we'll get along nicely. Nothing's going to happen. I'm here looking for information."

"Information?" the sick man repeated, dully.

"You got me," said The Hawk tersely. His voice was rather agreeable, Mr. Hamilton thought; confident, good-natured, vibrant with cheeriness. "You know," The Hawk went on, "if I'm ever taken—not that I ever expect to be, but *if* I am—I'll find myself in some pickle, believe me, concerning one little thing. That's why I am here."

"What are you talking about?"

"Coming down to brass tacks, Mr. Hamilton," said The Hawk, "did you, or did you

not, kill old Daddy Heinz?" He paused. "I know it's a personal question, but I must know the answer."

Yes, it was madness. The financier was convinced now. Suddenly it seemed that everybody in the world knew he had been in the house the night Daddy Heinz was killed! Instinctively he was on the defensive.

"Why do you ask me that?" he demanded instantly.

"You know," The Hawk went on in cheerful explanation, "*I* was in the house the night Daddy Heinz was killed; and there's a warrant out against me for his murder. Now *I* didn't kill him, but I know you were in that house because I saw you. I heard the shots; I ran to the top of the stairs, and saw you passing along the hallway with a revolver in your hand. Also, I saw you leaning over the body. Then I saw you pick up something—I think perhaps it was a diamond, and then—well, I began to get the idea that the police might have heard the shots and would hustle in, so I grabbed my belongings and hauled my freight. Now, what I want to know is, if you killed Daddy Heinz. You see I know *I* didn't; but there's a warrant charging me with it, and if I'm ever pinched I'll

have to know all about what actually happened. In a way, we are in the same boat."

For a long time there was silence; the financier's hands writhed nervously, then under the friendly stare of The Hawk's eyes he seemed to grow suddenly calm. Here was a fairy tale; he was living a part of it.

"Suppose," he questioned at last, "suppose I should deny I was in that house?"

"Oh, come now." The Hawk was quite good-natured about it. "I saw you, you know. Don't be afraid to tell me, for, *believe me*, I'm not going to appear in court against you. I merely want to know what actually happened."

Positively, there was something winning in The Hawk's manner. Mr. Hamilton felt braced, exhilarated. If this was a fairy tale it was a good one.

"I'll tell you frankly," he said. "I went to the place to see the old man about—about—"

"The garter thing. I know," interrupted The Hawk.

"While I was talking to him the electric buzz sounded, and it seemed to startle him—the buzz that connects with the front door, I mean. He asked me to step into a rear

room for a minute, and I did so. I was there, perhaps for five minutes, when I heard three shots. I had a revolver. I drew it and ran along the hall, with the one idea of protecting myself and escaping. As I ran into the hall I heard the front door bang—some one going out. Daddy Heinz was lying on the floor, alone. I went in, terrified. I hastily examined the body, and I got a splotch of—of blood on my hand!" He shuddered. "There was a revolver on the floor—I didn't touch that. But I *did* pick up a diamond which, I had reason to believe, came out of the Countess of Salisbury's garter. I was able to recognize it by the old-fashioned cutting—the rose cutting. My intention was to save it until opportunity presented to return it to the rightful owners. I have it yet."

The Hawk nodded understandingly.

"I believe you," he said, graciously. "It doesn't sound like the truth at that, does it? But neither would my story, so far as that goes."

Again fell a silence. The Hawk thoughtfully spun his revolver on his finger.

"You went to see old Daddy Heinz because—?"

"Because," the financier finished, "the garter disappeared mysteriously at the very moment I was trying to return it, through the police, to the British government. I imagined, perhaps, Daddy Heinz, from whom I bought it originally, might know something—"

"I get you," interrupted The Hawk. "And the key to the house? You had one?"

"Yes. Daddy Heinz gave it to me. Previously I had made half a dozen trips there."

The Hawk sat bobbing his head thoughtfully. Mr. Hamilton continued:

"There is a widespread belief that that garter is now in your possession?"

"It is," The Hawk agreed. "Like to see it?"

He produced it, and dangled it before the financier's astonished eyes. The sheer beauty of the trinket kindled a covetous blaze deep in the millionaire's brain. Involuntarily he reached for it; The Hawk withdrew it.

"That missing stone," The Hawk explained, "is the one you have. I gouged it out and hocked it with Daddy Heinz the day he was murdered."

"Will you sell that?" asked Mr. Hamilton.

"No," The Hawk laughed. "I thought you'd had enough of it."

"I will buy it, if you will sell it, and return it to the British government."

"Nothing doing."

"I'll give you twenty-five thousand dollars for it."

"No."

"Fifty?"

"No. I have another use for it; and besides I don't need the money. I've cleaned up a quarter of a million in the last month, and incidentally had a lot of fun with Meredith." He chuckled. "He's a funny gink, Meredith."

He arose, and stretched himself lazily. He was slender, almost boyish in figure, graceful, sinewy—built like a steel bridge.

"I'm sorry to have disturbed you," he apologized, "but I had to know how things were, because there might come—*might*, I say—a time when I'd need to know. And what you've told me, of course, is just between us. Don't let it worry you. And say," he was struck by a generous thought, "if this garter thing you're mixed up in gets too hot for you, shove it off on to me. I'll stand for it—anything you like but murder. Now, me for the tall timbers."

He silently unlocked the door into the nurse's room, then the door into the hall.

"Good night," he said. "Hope you're all right again soon. I'm sorry you're not well. As a matter of fact, I'm rather strong for your family. You know, I had an idea once I'd like to be your son-in-law. Good night."

The door opened and closed, silently; The Hawk was gone. The fairy tale was at an end. Brokaw Hamilton turned over comfortably, and went to sleep.

For the second time Detective Meredith was summoned to the Ritz-Carlton by the Russian ambassador. The first person he met as he entered the private reception room was—Bruce Colquhoun!

CHAPTER V

THERE was something closely akin to elation in August von Derp's manner as he came out of the room where Brokaw Hamilton lay ill, and joined Helen on the sun-drenched veranda. Aroused from dreamy contemplation of Long Island Sound, azure-blue in the distance, she glanced up quickly.

"How is father?" she asked.

"He had a most comfortable night," was the reply. "That, together with the assurance from John Gaunt that the fight is off until he is himself again, seems to have acted upon him like a tonic. He is quite cheerful."

"I'm so glad. Positively, I could kiss Mr. Gaunt for his magnanimity."

"And better yet," von Derp continued, the while his eager eyes blazed into her own, "he has practically consented to—to my attentions to you!"

"He *has*?" There was a curious emphasis in the question; von Derp opened his eyes inquiringly.

"You speak," he said, "as if—"

"Let's don't talk about it," Helen broke in hurriedly. "Let's talk about—"

"We will talk about it," von Derp insisted, eagerly. "It is the moment I have lived for and longed for. You know—"

"Oh, dear!" Helen complained. "Why will you?"

"Because I love you," he interrupted violently, passionately. In that moment of declaration all the little graces had fallen away from him. "Because there has never been a moment since I first saw you that I didn't love you. To-morrow your father will give his formal consent; to-day is mine with you—you!"

Helen regarded him with troubled eyes. Mere man has never solved the mystery of woman; von Derp, like all the rest of us, failed, and in that instant he realized his failure. Suddenly he was aware of something antagonistic in her attitude.

"Please don't," she requested, coldly.

"Why not?"

"Oh, because," vaguely.

"But why? You know I love—"

"I'm not in the mood for it, if you must know," Helen exclaimed, with an angry little

spot in her cheeks. "And besides you—you have no right!"

"You promised," he protested, "that if I should clear the name of—"

"You haven't done it," Helen pointed out, "and besides, now it isn't necessary."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Mr. Colquhoun has returned."

"You knew that?" von Derp didn't seem to be surprised. "*How* did you know it?"

"Oh, I just knew it."

"And Colquhoun's return?" he began.

"Don't you understand, Mr. von Derp?" Helen asked, and there was almost an appeal in her voice. "Don't you understand that I—I am under obligations to Mr. Colquhoun? That I had faith in him? That it was horrible to me to think that he should have died under a cloud? That there was nothing I wouldn't have given to have lifted that cloud? I had been unjust to him; it was only fair that I should make reparation even to a dead man!"

Von Derp arose suddenly, his fingers gripped in his palms, his face pallid.

"And," he said steadily, with accusing eyes, "you would have used me to— Your promises to me meant nothing?"

"I made no promises," Helen pointed out.

"But I have said that there is nothing I wouldn't have given to do justice to his memory—nothing, understand, even myself! Now that Mr. Colquhoun is alive, and is back to prove his innocence; now that—"

Von Derp didn't hear the remainder of it. He turned away as if in anger and strode to the far end of the veranda, where he stood for a long time looking out upon the Sound with smouldering eyes. Helen regarded him curiously. Here was a new mood in him. She had never believed him capable of strong emotion; always to her he had been merely ornamental, superficial, elegant like the—the trimmings of a motor car! Von Derp strode back toward her, his face grave; again he was the mathematically precise, ultra-courteous individual she had always known.

"Miss Hamilton, you have never understood just who I am," he said with that odd twist of speech which was characteristic of him in his serious moments. "Your father understands, but for your information I'll say I'm of a family old in German history, and wealthy as your own. But," and he emphasized the word, "in spite of all that I am a special agent of the Imperial Secret Service of Germany. I tell you this to make

you understand that when you pledged me to—to clear Bruce Colquhoun's name of its enshrouding ignominy, as you expressed it, you came to one who was able to bring to bear a vast experience in matters of this sort."

He paused. Helen's mouth had dropped open a little in her utter astonishment. He was only a policeman! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! He went on:

"I began the task you set for me. But I didn't go ahead with it because—" He broke off suddenly. "Perhaps I had better stop. I had intended to save you the shame of all this."

"Go on, please," said Helen bravely. All at once something rose in her throat. "Go on!"

Von Derp shrugged his shoulders.

"Instead of proving that Bruce Colquhoun was *not* The Hawk I found myself proving that he *was* The Hawk!"

Helen came to her feet with a blaze in the blue, blue eyes.

"I don't believe it!" she said.

"It doesn't really matter whether you believe it or not," von Derp told her. "He has never explained to your satisfaction who

he is, has he? No. Or why it was so necessary to keep his identity hidden? No. He has never explained his absence from Satuit *on every occasion when there was a jewel robbery in Boston, twenty-five miles away, has he? No. He has never—*"

"I don't believe it!" Helen repeated doggedly.

"It is susceptible of proof—immediate proof," von Derp stated. "I knew, before you did, that Bruce Colquhoun had chosen to return to life. I located him, oddly enough, in the hotel where I live; in my official capacity I searched his apartments, and found, not what I sought, but—*the Countess of Salisbury's garter!* I found some of the jewels stolen in the Boston thefts; I found, even, *some of your jewels!* And this was the man whose memory—"

"I don't believe it!"

"Your attitude," von Derp informed her coolly, with a slight raising of his brows, "is a credit to your heart, not your head; incidentally, it is no compliment to me. Perhaps you will give me an opportunity to prove what I say?" His voice softened strangely. "Believe me, there is nothing vindictive in my attitude. I love you; you

don't love me—you do love a man who is not worthy! Could you imagine anything more hideous than sacrificing yourself to that man? And understand me, I haven't reported to the police what I know, and because of my love for you I will not. But let me prove what I say—I can give you all the proof you can demand. If I fail to convince you—" He shrugged his shoulders. "May I prove it?"

"How?" Helen demanded rebelliously.

"It's simple enough. Will you come to his apartments with me and allow me to show you the things he has stolen? The jewels for which the police are scouring the world? Will you come?"

"I will!"

Helen didn't hesitate; this was no time for hesitation. Blindly, even against the evidence of her own reason at times, she had come to believe in Bruce Colquhoun; she was wearing his ring now, as a token of her faith in him. If he had deceived her! Her strong young hands closed spasmodically.

The run downtown in the motor car was made in silence. Von Derp ushered Helen ceremoniously into the public parlor.

"Allow me," he said, "to inquire at the

office if Colquhoun is in. It is not desirable that we should be interrupted."

She nodded, and he went away. He was gone perhaps five minutes, then together they went up in the elevator. Not once had it occurred to Helen that she was doing the unconventional thing. There was only the thought that if Bruce had deceived her, she must know it now. She suffered herself to be led along a corridor; together they entered an apartment on the fifth floor. There was something uncanny in von Derp's silence.

"If everything is just as it was the other day," he explained in a cautious undertone, "the Countess of Salisbury's garter should be here!" With his knife blade he threw the bolt in a small drawer of an *escritoire*, and pulled it open. "It is here!"

Helen looked, and looking fell back a step with one hand pressed to her eyes. The garter was there; brilliant, beautiful, scintillating. Von Derp paused, to gaze triumphantly into her face. In that instant she hated him! He was working at a lower drawer of a cabinet. Finally he pulled it open.

"Here, please," he said quietly.

Again Helen looked, and a little cry rose to

her lips. She stifled it, in helpless agony, and stood holding her clenched hands tightly to her lips. The bottom of the drawer was a shimmering, coruscating mass of jewels—here a pearl necklace worth many thousands of dollars; brooches, bracelets, rings, necklaces of diamonds!

“For some reason he keeps a portion of the stolen stuff in this other room,” von Derp explained. “If you will step this way?”

“I’ve seen enough,” she gasped, helplessly.

“But you haven’t seen the most important of all,” he declared.

Mutely she followed him; another drawer opened under his magic touch, and there—*there were her own jewels*,—at least a part of them! The cry came then—rage, mortification, agony! He had lied to her! That great joy that had come to her the other day when she, believing him dead, had found him living, died now. He had said that he had returned to prove his innocence. It had sounded plausible, so like him; and even at that moment he was hiding the jewels he had stolen from her. She swayed a little, and von Derp steadied her.

“Is the proof sufficient?” he asked.

"Home!" she murmured faintly. "Please take me away. I—am ill!"

Von Derp bowed courteously, and together they returned to the room they had just left. At that instant the door from the hall opened, and two men entered—Bruce Colquhoun and Detective Meredith. There was tense silence for a moment, then Helen drew back with a cry; von Derp seemed nonplused. Into Bruce's face came a sudden storm; it passed.

"Lock the door, Meredith," he directed.

"You'll permit us to go, please," said von Derp.

"Lock the door, Meredith," Bruce repeated. "We came to this apartment to take The Hawk."

"And you will," von Derp interrupted. "Take him, Meredith—there he stands beside you, this so-called Bruce Colquhoun! Take him! Meanwhile," he started toward the door. Helen clung to him desperately.

Meredith, who had seemed oddly befuddled, was galvanized into action all at once. There was grim joy in his face as he strode toward von Derp.

"We came to take The Hawk," he said. "Hold out your hands!"

"I?" von Derp started back in amazement.

"I? The Hawk? Really, Meredith, you're an amusing person." He burst out laughing.

"I? The Hawk?"

The perfect sincerity of his laugh, his manner, his tone caused Meredith to stop and look around helplessly at Bruce. Helen dropped down into a chair, with her face in her hands.

"Perhaps, Miss Hamilton, you had better go?"

Bruce stood beside Helen solicitously. She shook her head.

"And where, pray, did you get the impression that *I* was The Hawk?" von Derp taunted Meredith. His shallow eyes had narrowed to mere slits.

"I *know* it," Meredith declared forcibly.
"I know it because—"

"Well?"

"First, because there have been no crown jewels stolen from Germany. I have that on the direct authority of the chief of the Imperial Secret Service."

"Naturally," and von Derp shrugged his shoulders, "he doesn't let American *policemen* into secrets of that nature."

"Also, I know it because you lied to me about the plan of that house where I found

you that night. You said you had mailed it to me. As a matter of fact, Mr. Colquhoun mailed it to me! He picked it up aboard the motor boat where you had dropped it."

"He's—what do you Americans say?—he's bluffing."

"And finally," the detective drew two photographs and a slip of paper from his pocket, "I know it because I have exact, indisputable proof here. Here is the thumbprint of The Hawk, made in blood, in his last robbery; here is a duplicate of that thumbprint found on the *Pyramid*, showing The Hawk had been there."

"Naturally," von Derp nodded. "He lived aboard the boat."

"And last, on this slip of paper, I have Mr. Colquhoun's thumbprint. *It is not the same!* You can still convince me that you are not The Hawk, here, now! Do you dare to put your thumbprint beside these other three for comparison?"

"Certainly," said von Derp obligingly. "How shall I make the impression? There's a plate-glass tray there; it will take an impression admirably. Allow me," and he moved toward the bathroom, "to step in here and

put a little soap on my thumb so we may get a good print."

He disappeared into the bathroom. The door closed behind him with a crash, and Meredith and Colquhoun leaped toward it. From beyond the sturdy oaken panels came the muffled crack of a revolver!

"God!" Meredith dropped back. "He's killed himself!"

The world swam around Helen; she screamed once, then fainted. Her last impression of visible things was of Bruce and Meredith battering at the bathroom door.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN consciousness returned to Helen she was being held close, close, in Bruce's arms, his eyes burning into hers, his face seared by the torture of anxiety.

"Thank God," he said.

"Is—is he—dead?" she faltered.

"No," said Bruce. "He escaped. Meredith's gone in pursuit. He locked the door and fired the shot to make us think it was suicide. While we were trying to break in he stepped out on the fire escape, ran along to the window opening into the hall, and got away. It took us fifteen minutes to smash the door; he has just that much start of Meredith!"

Helen closed her eyes, infinitely relieved. It was best that he should have escaped, for, after all— Suddenly she remembered that she was being held very tightly in a young man's arms, and struggled to free herself. And that young man was a thief! He had stolen her jewels.

"Let me go," she panted angrily.

"No," Bruce held her.

"You must! I—you—"

"Why?"

"Because you—you— I hate you! You are a thief!"

"Indeed!" Bruce pinioned her arms, and gazed deeply into indignant eyes, with a slight smile. "What have I stolen?"

"Jewels—my jewels—other people's jewels."

"The Hawk—von Derp—stole those, not I."

"Then what—what in the name of goodness are all those things doing here in your apartment?"

"This," said Bruce, "is not my apartment. It's von Derp's apartment. Meredith and I came here to arrest him!"

"Von Derp's apartment?" Helen was so amazed she forgot to struggle. "But he said—he brought me here—to your apartment—to convince me!" She stammered on into silence. "Well!" she exclaimed. "And he is really The Hawk? He, and not you?"

"He is really The Hawk," Bruce assured her. "I will pay him the compliment of saying that he is one of the most gifted young men of my acquaintance. He was prepared for everything on earth but that thumbprint test; he had even forged indisputable credentials which, in an emergency, he used to

identify himself to Meredith after Meredith had actually *caught him in a theft!*"

"Then," Helen wriggled out of the encircling arms and pushed him away, "then who are you?"

"I? That's so, you don't know me, do you?" Bruce was apologetic. "I am one of the most cordially hated men in the world. I'm in the diplomatic service of Russia, despite the fact that I'm an American. I've been in that service for years, and have been honored with the confidence of the Czar. He exalted me to a position beyond my actual worth, and so it devolved upon me to come in conflict with the nihilists. I defeated a plot which had for its purpose the death of the Czar, and the nihilists passed sentence of death upon me. Never in the history of the world has a man been so persistently pursued as I have been—through Siberia, China, Japan, Hawaii, through Central and South America—for more than a year they have sought me. Twice I have been slightly wounded, four times I have been betrayed by people I trusted. Finally I reached the point where I trusted no one—the police least of all. I locked my identity within myself, and even then—"

"And even then?" Helen asked.

"And even then they found me in Satuit. There was only one thing to do—to run, and I did run; however, I came back, you will remember, to see if you still wore the little ring. You found it, I see. I thank you. I had not given my pursuers credit for their shrewdness. They traced me back, and the explosion on the *Pyramid* was the result. As I told you, I ran away from Meredith and his men that night because I thought they were the nihilists. Aboard the *Pyramid* I heard a clock ticking—and to me a clock ticking means an infernal machine! There was no clock aboard the *Pyramid*. I didn't wait. I went straight over the far side, and was a hundred feet off when the explosion came. In the excitement I swam ashore, and escaped, allowing the police, the nihilists, the world at large—everybody—to believe that I was dead! That gave me opportunity to haul in fourteen of the nihilists in Lynndyll, New Jersey, with the aid of special agents of the Russian government who are under orders of the Russian ambassador. At the same time half a hundred others were taken in Russia, and I think it is safe to say that the most powerful band of assassins in the world is

broken up." He paused and stared deep, deep into the wondering eyes. "I love you," he added irrelevantly.

"But—but—what is your name?" Helen stammered, her face suffused. "You told me that Colquhoun—"

"Oh, my name. It's Treadway—Bruce Treadway, of Virginia stock. My mother was a Colquhoun, a descendant, by the way, of the Countess of Salisbury to whom, in 1344, Edward III gave the jeweled garter which has been so prominent in matters concerning you and me. By the way," he added, "did you ever see that garter?"

"Yes," said Helen. "I saw it in the drawer—"

"Oh, that's the one that was stolen from the British Museum," Bruce informed her. "Here's another." He produced the glittering trinket from his long pocketbook; Helen caught her breath sharply. "There were two of them, it seems, so—"

"Naturally a lady would require *two*," said Helen.

"This one remained in my family, but I was never able to identify it perfectly until I picked up a photograph—the photograph you saw on the *Pyramid*—in New London.

As a matter of fact, at that time I was out of touch with my government, with my friends, and I contemplated selling this to replenish my supply of cash."

"Sell that?" exclaimed Helen. "Indeed, you will not!"

"That's right; I will not," Bruce agreed. And again, irrelevantly: "I love you!"

"Bruce Colquhoun," and Helen struggled in his arms, "if—if you kiss me, I shall scream."

"And if you don't kiss me," he said solemnly, "I shall scream. It might make it unpleasant for you, because there are four detectives waiting outside the door for my permission to come in."

He was a masterful, arrogant chap. Helen's lips parted slightly, flower-like, to receive his kiss.

Dexter, of Scotland Yard, was an amazed person when he was summoned to police headquarters that afternoon and the Countess of Salisbury's garter, with one of the diamonds missing, was placed in his hands.

"Where did you get it?"

"It was among the stolen jewels recovered in The Hawk's apartments," Meredith told

him curtly. "Give me a receipt for it, and hustle it over to London before something else happens to it."

"But, I say, you know, who had it?" Dexter insisted. "What millionaire was it that—"

"Oh, forget it," Meredith advised. "It wasn't John Gaunt, anyway."

"But, you know—gad! It's too bad! I was convinced Gaunt had it, you know; I even searched his house for it. Too bally bad, eh, what?"

Four days, with Meredith and his men raging, sped by, and there was no trace of The Hawk. A portion, but only a portion, of the stolen jewels had been recovered; obviously, from The Hawk's manner of living, the remainder had been converted into cash through some subterranean channel. Early in the afternoon of that fourth day Meredith's 'phone rang.

"Hello!"

"That you, Meredith?"

"Yes."

"This is Bruce Colquhoun. Von Derp—The Hawk—will be in Daddy Heinz' old place at four o'clock this afternoon. Place your men after he enters the place, not

before, and you'll get him. Look out for the back way, too."

"Thanks." Meredith's heart beat faster. "How do you know he'll be there?"

"I'll explain when I see you. Now don't fail if you want The Hawk!"

"If I want The Hawk!" Meredith repeated grimly. "All I'd give to get him is one of my arms, that's all."

"All right. I'll see you this evening some time."

So it came to pass that while Meredith's men were anxiously awaiting the specified hour, a pale, clean-shaven young man in rigid clerical attire, with thick eyeglasses and brown hair brushed back smoothly from his placid brow, strode up the walk to the front door of Brokaw Hamilton's home and rang the bell.

"Please be good enough," he requested of the footman, "to hand my card to Miss Hamilton. The Rev. Mr. Arthur Wallace."

He put his hat on the floor, and sat down with his finger tips humbly touching, and looked about him meekly at the splendor of a millionaire's home.

"Miss Hamilton," the returning footman reported, "has gone out."

"Too bad," commented the caller, gently.
"May I leave a note for her?"

The footman bowed and conducted him to a desk in the library adjoining. Suppose we look over his shoulder as he writes:

"MY DEAR MISS HAMILTON:

"I loved you—that accounts for everything. There's nothing I wouldn't have done to win you. I *did* steal; I would have done murder—would have, but didn't. Every other charge the police bring against me is correct.

"The first thought of placing my identity upon the shoulders of Bruce Colquhoun came the day Meredith asked him for that handwriting specimen. Only chance had led Meredith so close to me, and here was an opportunity too good to overlook. That handwriting incident gave me an idea. I searched the *Pyramid* to find a sample of Mr. Colquhoun's, and *did* find it—a laundry list. If the handwriting experts hadn't disagreed then—oh, well.

"I am leaving with the footman a parcel containing some few of your jewels that were not found in my apartments. Please don't think too badly of me.

"Sincerely,

"THE HAWK."

The clerical young man sealed the envelope, and handed it, with a parcel, to the waiting footman.

"If you will please see that Miss Hamilton in person receives these?" he requested

meekly. "And, while I am here, may I use your telephone, please?"

"Certainly, sir."

The footman held open the door of the booth, and the young man disappeared inside. Two minutes later New York police headquarters was on the other end of the wire.

"Mr. Meredith is out, isn't he?"

"Yes," came the reply.

"Please tell him when he comes in that once upon a time he remarked that The Hawk could never make a monkey of him again. And add that The Hawk *has* made a monkey of him again. Inform him that it was not Bruce Colquhoun who sent him on the wild-goose chase to West Thirtieth Street, but The Hawk in person."

"Who—who—" there was a stammering at the other end of the wire, "—who is this?"

"The Hawk!"

"Holy Moses! Where are you?"

"Where am I?" The young man smiled blandly. "I am in Jersey City. Give my regards to Mr. Meredith. Good-by." He was about to hang up. "Oh, one other thing," he called. "It wasn't The Hawk who was wounded that night the bloody

thumbprint was left in Boston, although it was The Hawk's thumbprint, all right. The man who was wounded was The Hawk's accomplice in the Boston robberies. Good-by."

The murderer of old Daddy Heinz was never found. Brokaw Hamilton was convinced that the murderer was not The Hawk, but possibly some other crook who, disgruntled, had come in, demanded money, and been refused. He considered the matter in detail one day when he mailed a single unset diamond to Scotland Yard, London.

CHAPTER VII

"YOU know," said Helen, "I've only one objection to marrying you?"

"That being?" Bruce inquired.

"It seems inevitable that when a young man saves a young woman from drowning he marries her."

"That doesn't necessarily follow," Bruce pointed out. "I saved three once."

A long pause; Helen was staring across Peggotty Beach toward a rock where sat Skeets Gaunt and Mercy Dale. Somewhere out there beneath the restless waters the motor boat *Pyramid* lay. Helen shuddered a little.

"Do you remember," she asked, "the very first thing you ever said to me?"

"I do."

"What was it?"

" 'Don't grab me!' "

"Suppose I had grabbed you?"

"I should have punched you in the nose."

"Why *Bruce Colquhoun!*"

There was silence, broken only by the murmur of the sea. Dusk dropped down upon them tangibly; the gold in the west

became an angry crimson—the red sun was gone. To the north, across the marshes, a lighthouse leaped into life. Skeets and Mercy had turned to watch it.

“I love you!” it said. “I love you!”
And again: “I love you!”

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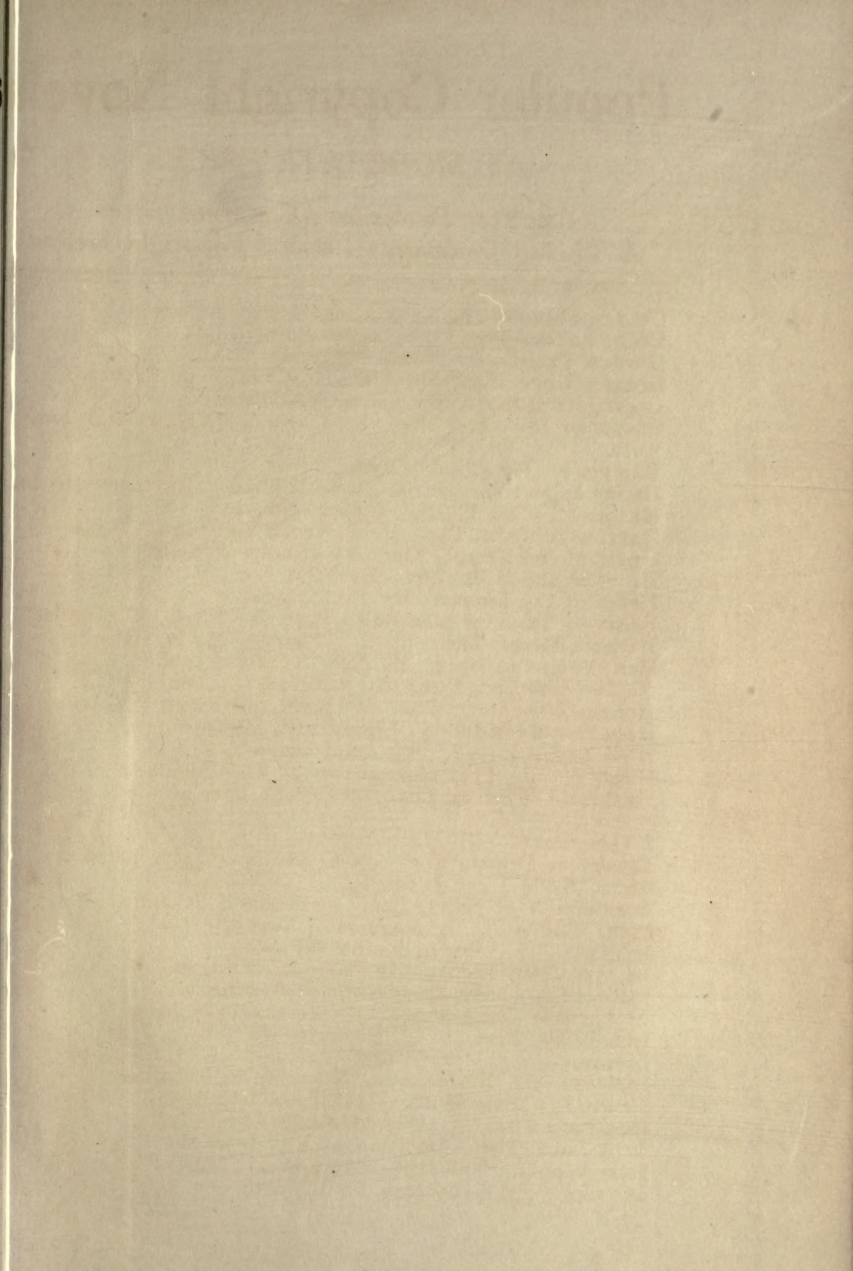
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Futrelle, Jacques,
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My lady's garter. --

